COLDSTREAM GUARDS OVER 350 YEARS ON THE FRONT LINE

HISTORY of WAR™

AFRIKA KORPS VETERAN

FIGHTING IN THE RANKS OF ROMMEL'S ELITE

BORODINO

Step onto Napoleon's bloodiest battlefield

TSAR VERSUS SULTAN

19TH C BALKAN RECKONING

617 SQUADRON DAMBUSTERS

7 DECADES OF PROUD SERVICE

- 1944: Sinking the Tirpitz
- 1961: Vulcan strike force
- 2003: Operation Telic

ANGLO-SAXON GUERRILLA WAR
MEET ENGLAND'S MEDIEVAL RESISTANCE FIGHTERS

HERO MARINE OF TARAWA
MEDAL OF HONOR SACRIFICE IN THE PACIFIC

AFRICA'S HEART OF DARKNESS
INSIDE THE CONGO'S CROSS-BORDER CARNAGE

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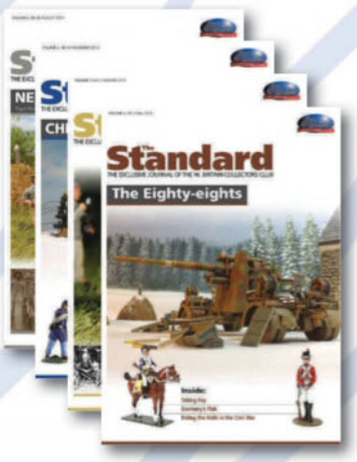

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Welcome

"As the pilot of the aircraft, you must keep cool and make sure everybody else does"

– Lawrence 'Benny' Goodman, 617 Squadron veteran

Few countries in the world have as rich and as old a military heritage as the UK, and this issue takes a look at two of its most prestigious units.

Though perhaps most famous for its role guarding the British monarch, the Coldstream Guards is one of the British Army's oldest regiments and has been in continual service since the 17th century – seeing action at Waterloo, the Crimean War, the Somme, and into the modern day in Afghanistan.

Though the RAF's 617 Squadron is comparatively young, its accolades are no less renowned. The Dambusters' raid was just the beginning of the squadron's illustrious service, which like the Coldstreamers, continues into the present day.

Tim Williamson
Editor

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CONTRIBUTORS

TOM GARNER
As well as delving into the story of 617 Squadron (page 26), this issue, Tom has also been getting to grips with one of Napoleon's bloodiest battlefields, and the fatal undoing of his doomed Russian campaign: Borodino (page 38).

GAVIN MORTIMER
Over on page 48, Gavin gets to grips with the inner workings of the Afrika Korps, including an interview with German veteran Rudolf Schneider, who was in Erwin Rommel's personal bodyguard and even served as the Desert Fox's driver.

MIGUEL MIRANDA
Miguel has been burning the midnight oil this month, working on his epic account of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 (page 72). On page 86, he delves into Africa's heart of darkness for the Briefing on the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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Her Majesty the Queen inspects the 1st Battalion and number 7 Company of the Coldstream Guards at Windsor Castle

© Alamy

617 SQUADRON DAMBUSTERS AND BEYOND

26 Follow the illustrious story of the RAF's iconic bomber unit: 617 Squadron

Frontline

Subscribe

BORODINO

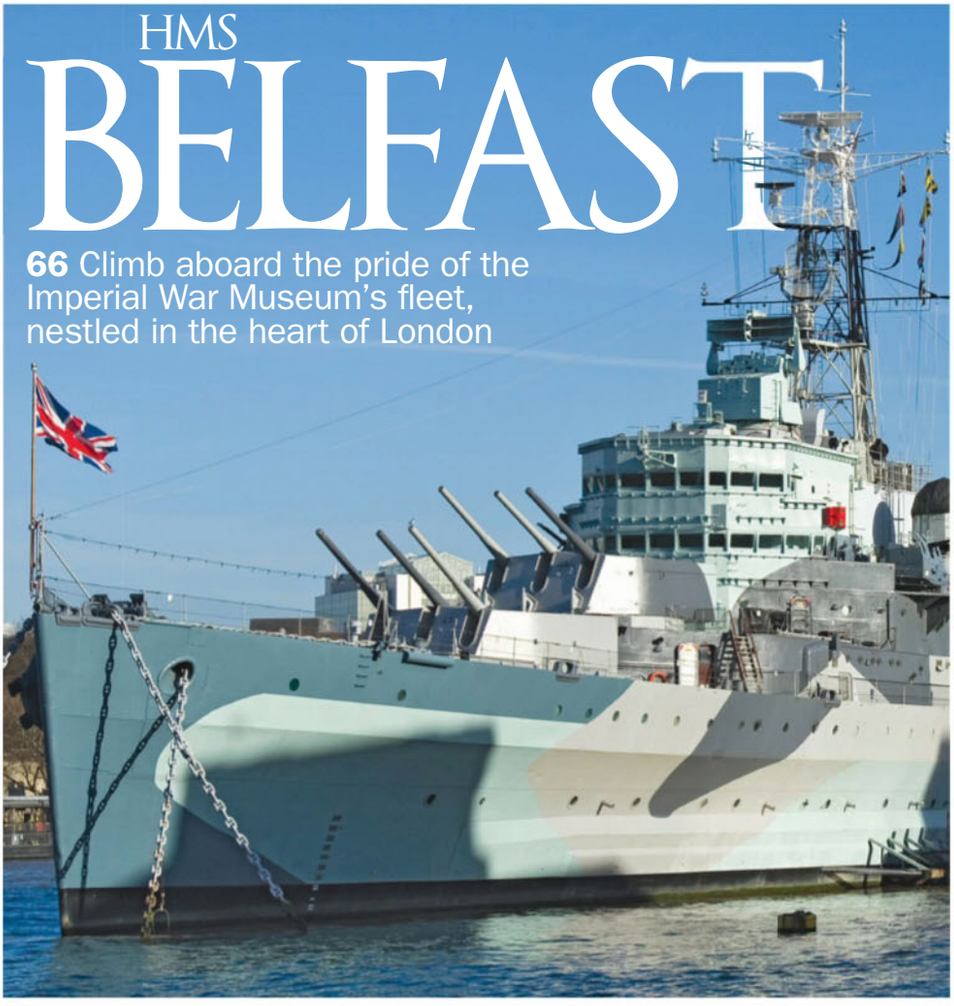
38 Step onto Napoleon's bloodiest battlefield

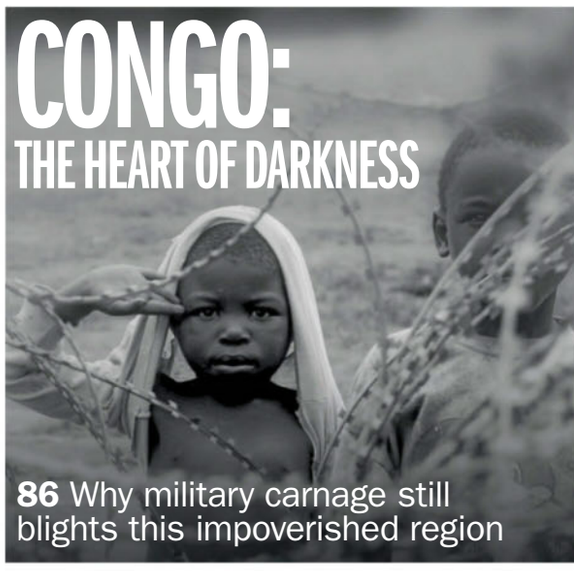
TURKEY vs RUSSIA
THE BALKAN RECKONING

72 Uncover how these two superpowers went head-to-head to settle old scores

HMS
BELFAST

66 Climb aboard the pride of the Imperial War Museum's fleet, nestled in the heart of London





86 Why military carnage still blights this impoverished region

WAR in FOCUS

READY, AIM, FEUER!

Taken: ***c 1930s***

German Army officers carefully aim their pistols down a range, while adopting more traditional firing stances reminiscent of pistol duelling. However, these single-shot target pistols would have only been used for practise purposes. The most common sidearms at the time included Lugers and Walthers.

WAR in FOCUS

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

Taken: ***23 November 2007***

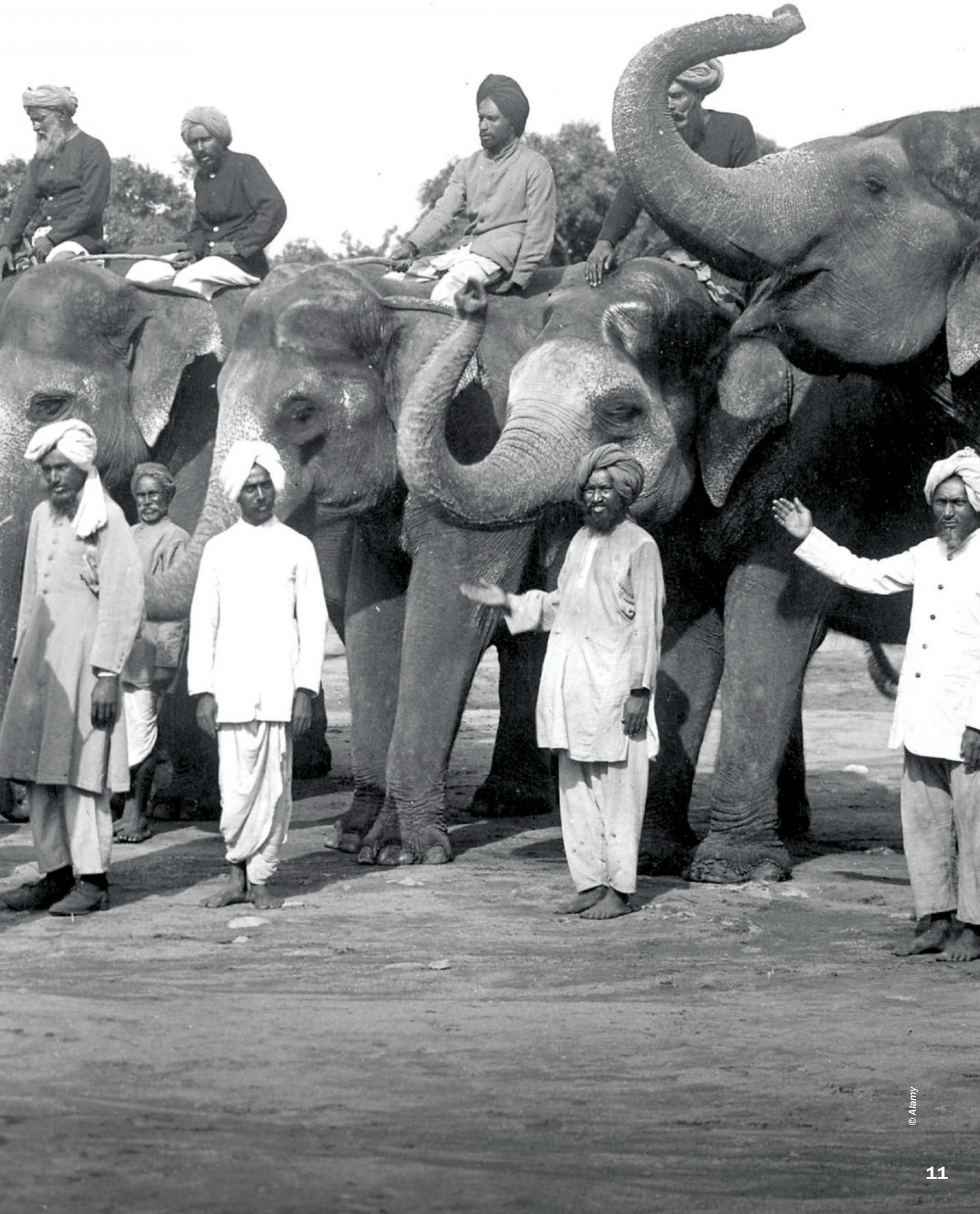
It may appear to show some spectral special effects, but this long-exposure photo has actually captured British troops firing a mortar during operations in Helmand province, Afghanistan. The mortar is firing an illumination round (right), in support of Afghan National forces during a night-time attack.

WAR in FOCUS

SILENCE ON PARADE!

Taken: ***c 1900***

An elephant battery stands to attention, just after the turn of the century in the British Raj. Elephants had been used regularly by the British Indian Army since the Anglo-Afghan wars throughout the 19th century. Each of these creatures would tow heavy field guns and artillery to and from the frontline.



WAR in FOCUS

B-52 GRAVEYARD

Taken: ***12 December 1993***

Hundreds of B-52 Stratofortresses line the desert at Davis Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, waiting to be dismantled. After the end of the Cold War, both the USA and Russia agreed to mutual disarmament, meaning scrapping vast quantities of military hardware, including the iconic heavy bomber.

TIMELINE OF THE...

COLDSTREAM GUARDS

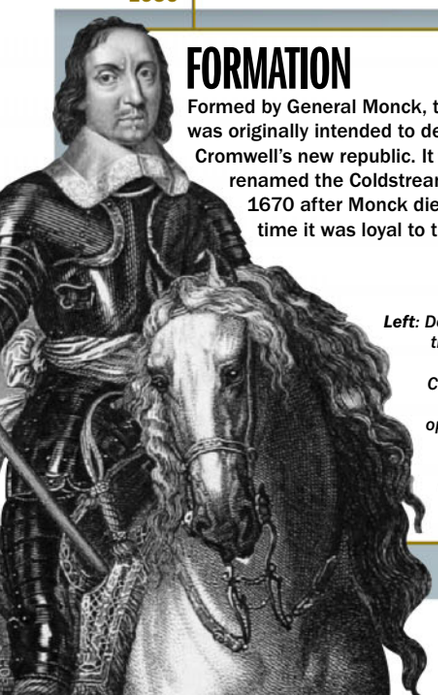
One of Britain's oldest regiments has served republic, king and country for over three centuries

The Coldstreamers' famous defence of the farmhouse at Hougoumont is seen by many as key to Wellington's victory at Waterloo

THE NAPOLEONIC WARS

The Coldstreamers defeated Napoleon's Grand Armée on numerous occasions during the Peninsular Campaign, and eventually helped to destroy it once and for all at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

1650 — 1803-1815 — 1853-56 — 1880-1902



FORMATION

Formed by General Monck, the regiment was originally intended to defend Cromwell's new republic. It was renamed the Coldstream Guards in 1670 after Monck died, by which time it was loyal to the monarchy.

***Left:** Despite winning the British Civil Wars, Oliver Cromwell faced considerable opposition from supporters of the monarchy until his death in 1658*

THE CRIMEAN WAR

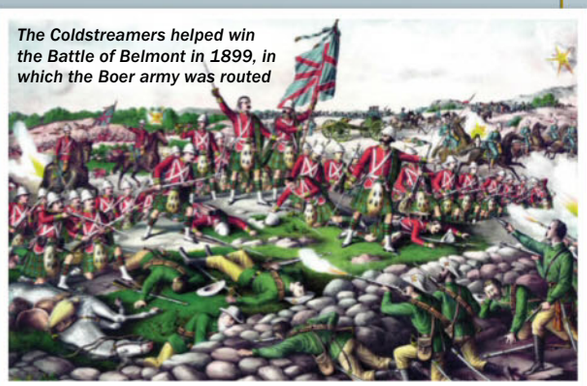
The Coldstreamers fought throughout Britain's two-and-half year campaign against Imperial Russia in the Crimea, winning battle honours at both the Siege of Sevastopol and at the Battle of Inkerman.

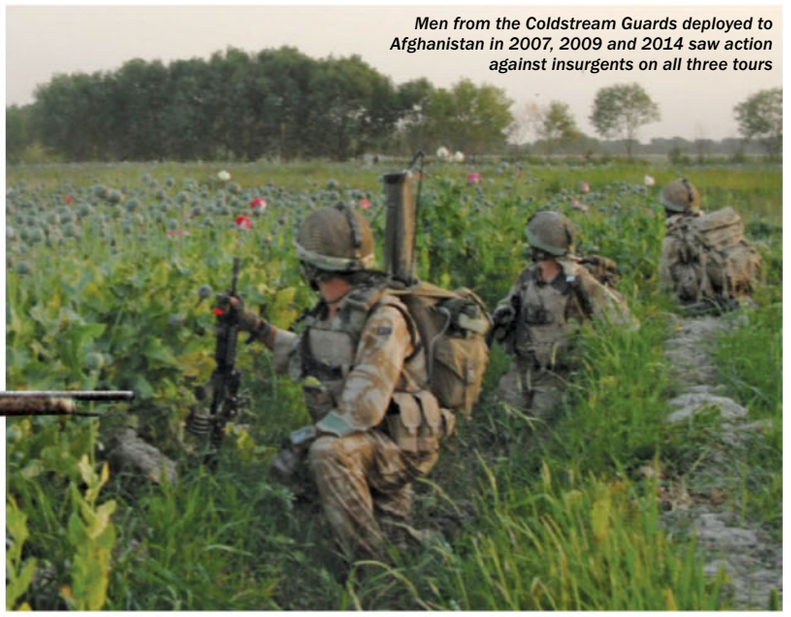
***Below:** Coldstream Guards Joseph Numa, John Potter and James Deal*

THE BOER WARS

The fight Britain picked with South Africa's Boers over the region's gold reserves was to prove both tricky and costly. The Coldstreamers were once again called upon to fight.

The Coldstreamers helped win the Battle of Belmont in 1899, in which the Boer army was routed





Men from the Coldstream Guards deployed to Afghanistan in 2007, 2009 and 2014 saw action against insurgents on all three tours

AFGHANISTAN

The Coldstreamers have served in Afghanistan three times over a period of 15 years. Between 2001-2015, 456 British soldiers lost their lives during anti-insurgent operations in Helmand Province and elsewhere.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The Coldstream Guards again found themselves in the thick of it during the next war. They served in north Africa, Italy and northern Europe both on foot and in tanks.

Coldstream Guards Reservists leaving Chelsea Barracks – 1939

Wallace/ANL/REX/Shutterstock

1914-18 — 1939-45 — 1990 — 2007-PRESENT DAY

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The Coldstreamers saw action right throughout the war, fighting at the 1st and 3rd Battles of Ypres, as well as at Mons, Loos, Ginchy and the Battle of the Somme.

***Right:** Two soldiers of the Coldstream Guards at a drinking-water point, during the Battle of Passchendale, October 1917*

THE FIRST GULF WAR

When Saddam Hussein's forces marched into Kuwait in August 1990, the biggest allied army since D-Day was assembled to force them out again. Among them was the 1st battalion of the Coldstream Guards.

Iraqi prisoners are searched by an Allied soldier during Operation Desert Storm

Images: Alamy, Getty, Rex Features

GUARDING THE WORLD

For centuries, the Coldstreamers have played a pivotal role across the globe

THE TROUBLES
1968–98 NORTHERN IRELAND

THE MONMOUTH REBELLION
1685 ENGLAND

WORLD WAR I
1914–18 FRANCE

THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR
1754–63 FRANCE/GERMANY

THE AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE
1775–83 NORTH AMERICA

PENINSULAR WAR
1807–14 SPAIN

FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY WARS
1792–1802 EUROPE/NORTH AFRICA

THE NINE YEARS' WAR
1688–97 BELGIUM

1 THE SIEGE OF NAMUR 1695

The Coldstreamers helped recapture this strategically vital city in present-day Belgium – the most significant victory in the Nine Years' War.

2 THE SIEGE OF YORKTOWN 1781

Around 500 Coldstreamers were among defeated British troops at Yorktown. It was the turning point of the American War of Independence.

3 THE BATTLE OF INKERMAN 1854

Coldstreamers played a key role in this victory, which destroyed the will of the Russian Army who had heavily outnumbered the allies.

4 BATTLE OF DIAMOND HILL 1900

Again the Coldstreamers were to be instrumental in ensuring a British victory. It was the turning point of the Second Boer War.

The charges of the CIVs and the Coldstreamers at the Battle of Diamond Hill

Two guard regiments, Coldstream and Grenadier, fought at the Battle of Inkerman, 1854

5 THE SOMME 1916

The Coldstreamers fought bravely during Britain's costliest battle ever, seizing strategically significant German positions in Ginchy, despite suffering severe casualties.

6 SALERNO LANDINGS 1943

The Coldstream Guards were among the first Allied troops to invade mainland Europe when they landed at Salerno in September 1943.

Above: Salerno was among the first large scale opposed landings on mainland Europe during WWII

3 CRIMEAN WAR
1853-56 RUSSIA

CYPRUS EMERGENCY
1974 CYPRUS

AFGHANISTAN
2007–PRESENT DAY AFGHANISTAN

WORLD WAR II
1939–45 WESTERN DESERT /ITALY/WESTERN EUROPE

FIRST GULF WAR
1990–91 KUWAIT

MALAYAN EMERGENCY
1948–60 MALAYSIA

4 SECOND BOER WAR
1899–1902 SOUTH AFRICA

"THE COLDSTREAM GUARDS WERE AMONG THE FIRST ALLIED TROOPS TO INVADE MAINLAND EUROPE WHEN THEY LANDED AT SALERNO IN SEPTEMBER 1943"

7 OPERATION MOSHTARAK 2010

One of the largest operations of the Afghan War saw Coldstreamers help to drive the Taliban out of its stronghold in Marjah.

The Coldstream Guards were involved in joint operations with US troops in Marjah, Afghanistan

Images: Alamy, Rex Features

HEROES OF THE GUARD

Some of the British army's most gifted commanders and fearless soldiers have left their mark on the regiment over the centuries

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL GEORGE MONCK

YEARS ACTIVE: 1650-61

In 1649, King Charles I was executed and Cromwell took control of the country, but his rule was a fragile one, with support for the Royalist cause still strong – particularly in Scotland. So in 1650, Cromwell raised a new regiment for his New Model Army to challenge Royalist forces north of the border.

The regiment's first commanding officer was General George Monck, who had been imprisoned for fighting for the Royalists during the civil war. While in prison, however, he wrote a book on military tactics that impressed Cromwell so much, he was offered his freedom in exchange for swearing allegiance to the Cromwellian cause. Known as Monck's Regiment of Foot, the unit spent the next decade quashing the Royalist cause all over Scotland.

After Cromwell died in 1658, the country was once again plunged into chaos. In January 1660, Monck, now determined to help restore order, marched on London with a force of 6,000 soldiers, starting his journey in the small village of Coldstream.

As Monck travelled south, he was able to gauge the mood of the country. When he arrived in London, he told the House of Commons what he'd seen and heard, warning the politicians that the country was sliding back into civil war. Almost immediately, parliament was dissolved, elections held and a new government installed. Among its first acts was the restoration of the monarchy. Cromwell's New Model Army was disbanded – except for Monck's Regiment of Foot, which was spared. In February 1661 at a ceremony at Tower Hill in London, Monck's force symbolically laid down their arms as Republican soldiers and raised them again as Royal ones. The Coldstream Guards had been born.

***Right:** Monck's Regiment of Foot only changed its name to the Coldstream Guards after Monck's death in 1670*

Frederick once had a duel with a fellow colonel who had insulted him. When his opponent missed, Frederick lowered his gun

PRINCE FREDERICK, DUKE OF YORK

YEARS ACTIVE: 1784-93

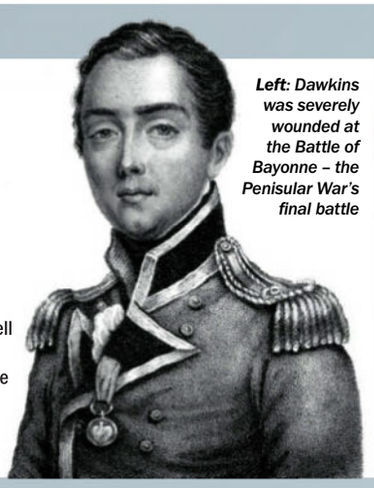
When George III decided his second son Prince Frederick should pursue a career in the military, he sent him first to learn his trade with the 2nd Horse Grenadier Guards (today's 2nd Life Guards) in 1782, before promoting him to colonel of the Coldstream Guards on 28 October 1784.

Although setbacks in his early career as a soldier during the Anglo-Russian invasion of Holland in 1799 saw him mocked in the popular children's rhyme 'The Grand Old Duke Of York', he turned into a fine military reformer. His experiences in Holland made him realise how woefully unprepared Britain's army was. By the start of the 19th century he was the country's commander-in-chief, had played a key role in establishing the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, was responsible for preparing the country's defences against French invasion, and had created a force that could cope with Napoleon's Grand Armée.

"ALTHOUGH SETBACKS IN HIS EARLY CAREER AS A SOLDIER DURING THE ANGLO-RUSSIAN INVASION OF HOLLAND IN 1799 SAW HIM MOCKED IN THE POPULAR CHILDREN'S RHYME 'THE GRAND OLD DUKE OF YORK', HE TURNED INTO A FINE MILITARY REFORMER"

LIEUTENANT COLONEL HENRY DAWKINS
YEARS ACTIVE: 1804-26

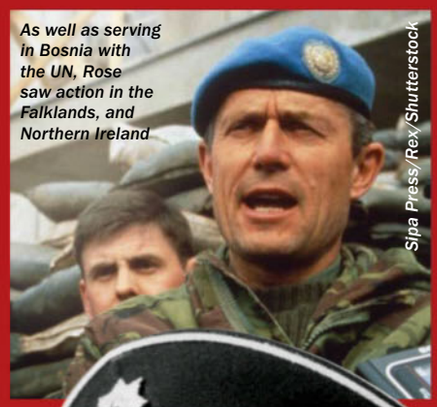
Dawkins joined the regiment as an ensign in 1804 and served with them during one of the most intense periods of combat it ever experienced – the Peninsular War. Between 1811 and 1814, Dawkins was in almost constant action. He was with the 2nd Battalion during the French retreat from Santarem in 1811 and fought at the Battle of Fuentes de Oñoro the same year. In 1812, he fought at Salamanca and in the sieges of Ciudad Rodrigo and Burgos. The year after, he fought at the Battle of Vitoria, as well as at Nive and Nivelle. But 1814 was the year that his luck would run out. Lieutenant Colonel Dawkins was severely wounded at the Battle of Bayonne in April. Promoted to captain, he did eventually make a full recovery just in time to fight in the Battle of Waterloo the following year – a battle that he also managed to survive.



***Left:** Dawkins was severely wounded at the Battle of Bayonne – the Penisular War's final battle*

SIR MICHAEL ROSE
YEARS ACTIVE: 1964-2000

General Sir Michael Rose is arguably the British army's most celebrated soldier of the modern era. He joined the Coldstream Guards as a second lieutenant in 1964 and was soon working his way through the ranks, carving out an increasingly specialised combat role. A major by the time he was in his late 30s, he was appointed commanding officer of the SAS, in 1979 he was commanding the SAS during the Falklands War, and in 1989 was appointed Britain's first-ever director of special forces. Further promotions followed, and as a lieutenant general he became commander of the UK Field Army in 1993 before taking on the role of commander of the UN Protection Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the Yugoslav Civil War. Towards the end of his career, he returned to the regiment he had started out with, however, this time he was appointed colonel of the Coldstream Guards in April 1999.



As well as serving in Bosnia with the UN, Rose saw action in the Falklands, and Northern Ireland

Sipa Press/Rex/Shutterstock

Campbell was dubbed the "Tally-ho" VC by the tabloid press

JOHN CAMPBELL VC
YEARS ACTIVE: 1896-1933

By the time World War I broke out John 'Jock' Campbell was a career soldier who'd already fought in the Boer War, during which he'd been awarded the Distinguished Service Order and had twice been mentioned in despatches. By September 1916 he found himself at Ginchy in France, fighting in the calamitous Battle of the Somme. During an offensive that had already seen two waves of his battalion wiped out by German machine-gun fire, Campbell took personal command of the third wave and attacked. He rallied his men and then led them against the enemy machine gun posts, capturing them and killing the occupants. In doing so he saved the lives of countless men under his command and, according to his citation, "enabled the division to press on to capture objectives of the highest tactical importance." Later that same year he was promoted to the rank of brigadier general.

PETER WRIGHT VC
YEARS ACTIVE: 1936-45

***Right:** On hearing he had won the VC, Wright modestly replied. "Can't be me, must be some other CSM Wright"*

On 25 September CSM Wright, a tall, quiet man from Suffolk, was with the third battalion of the Coldstream Guards in Salerno southern Italy. His unit was ordered to attack a heavily defended German position on top of a hill, and he watched on in horror as German machine-gun fire shredded the two companies of Coldstreamers. With no officers left to lead them, and with the assault teams pinning his comrades down and inflicting serious casualties, Wright single-handedly stormed three machine gun nests, going about his business with grenades and bayonet. The attack then resumed and the German position was eventually taken. For his bravery Wright was awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal – but there was to be a further twist. On hearing of Wright's incredible bravery, King George VI upgraded the medal to a Victoria Cross – the first time such an intervention had ever taken place.

RONALD BRITTAIN
YEARS ACTIVE: 1917-54

***Right:** Brittain is thought to have been the originator of the drill-sergeant's favourite insult "you 'orrible little man!"*

The regimental sergeant major is a legend in the Coldstream Guards. The quintessential regimental sergeant major, he was strict, tough and totally dedicated to the regiment. It was also said that he had the loudest voice in the British army.

Born in Liverpool, Brittain had enlisted in the King's Liverpool Regiment while still a teenager in order to fight in World War I, before transferring to the South Wales Borderers. Standing at six foot three, he was always destined for the Guards – which has historically always recruited the tallest soldiers in the army – and soon joined the Coldstreamers' ranks. After the war he was attached to the training staff at Sandhurst, where he shouted at more than 40,000 officer cadets over the decades. He served for a staggering 37 years – well past the normal retiring age – and achieved minor celebrity status afterwards for his post-army work in film and TV.

THE DEFENCE OF HOUGOUMONT

During the decisive land battle of the Napoleonic Wars, the Coldstreamers earned their most celebrated battle honour against overwhelming odds

When Napoleon's troops came upon Wellington's army near Waterloo on 18 June 1815, they found the main bulk of it defending high ground from behind the safety of a ridgeline. Its flanks, however, were defended by troops in farmhouses that stood in open ground – one at La Haye Sainte on Wellington's left, and one at Hougoumont on his right. Although the former would fall, the 2,000 men defending Hougoumont's chateau and its outbuildings – including men of the 2nd battalion of the Coldstream Guards stationed in the chateau's courtyard itself – would hold out against overwhelming odds for the entire battle.

"HORRIFIC HAND-TO-HAND FIGHTING TAKES PLACE BEFORE THE COLDSTREAMERS MANAGE TO GET THE GATES SHUT AGAIN"

1. BRITISH OCCUPY HOUGOUMONT

Wellington, the master defensive tactician, picks his battleground carefully. The evening before the battle takes place, he sends out troops from the Coldstream Guards and the Light Footguards to seize the chateau of Hougoumont and hold it at all costs.

2. FRENCH FORCES PROBE

Later that night, French cavalry reconnoitre the area. On approaching the chateau complex, they're repelled by troops stationed in the wood to Hougoumont's south. Napoleon realises he must now seize the position or risk his advancing army being split.

3. THE FIRST ATTACK

Around 11.30am the following morning, 6,000 French infantrymen hit Hougoumont. Although they manage to drive Wellington's troops out of the wood, they are cut down in the open ground, and so they withdraw.

4. THE SECOND ATTACK

The French, under the command of Napoleon's brother Jerome, now try to outflank Hougoumont. Diversionary attacks come from the south and west while light cavalry are sent around the back to attack it from the north.

5. THE DEFENCES ARE BREACHED

Although barricaded in, the British forces have left the chateau's north gate open in order to aid resupply from the main force that is directly behind them. As the defences west of the chateau are overwhelmed, French troops chase the fleeing British back towards these gates.

6. HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT

The French manage to hack their way through the gates on the north side of the chateau's courtyard. Horrific hand-to-hand fighting takes place before the Coldstreamers manage to shut the gates again. Roughly 40 Frenchmen that are trapped inside are then slaughtered.

7. THE THIRD ATTACK

Jerome mounts another attack through the orchard to the chateau's east, but their advance is halted when they come under fire from the Coldstream Guards who are firing at them from behind the wall of the chateau's formal garden.

8. ARTILLERY BOMBARDMENT

Jerome now hammers Hougoumont with artillery fire. A howitzer at the edge of the woods starts dropping incendiary shells into Hougoumont, setting buildings ablaze. The Coldstreamers go on the offensive, retaking the orchard and driving the French back.

9. THE FOURTH ATTACK

The French attack again, the orchard is retaken for a second time, but again their advance is stopped by the Coldstreamers. A British counter-attack then forces them out of the orchard for the second time that day.

10. THE FINAL ASSAULT

Emboldened by the fall of La Haye Sainte on Wellington's left, Hougoumont is attacked again in force. The orchard is retaken, but the French are checked by the indomitable Coldstreamers. Shortly afterwards, Prussian reinforcements tip the battle's balance and Napoleon is defeated.

CLOSING THE GATES AT HOUGOUMONT

At one point in the battle, the French broke into this courtyard at Hougoumont where vicious, close-up combat left dozens dead

HOLDING HOUGOUMONT WAS PIVOTAL TO WELLINGTON'S VICTORY AT WATERLOO BUT FOR A FEW BRIEF MINUTES ITS DEFENCE HUNG IN THE BALANCE

At about 12.30pm during the second French assault against Hougoumont, the hulking frame of Sous-Lieutenant Legro of the French 1st Infantry managed to smash his way through the gate at the northern end of the courtyard with an axe. As soon as it was breached, French troops began pouring inside. Hougoumont looked like it might fall, which would have left Wellington's right flank fatally exposed, shifting the battle in Napoleon's favour. Recognising the grave danger, the garrison's commanding officer Lieutenant-Colonel James MacDonnell led a charge directly through the ensuing mêlée in order to shut the gates against the hordes of French troops who were trying to push their way inside.

Assisted by a handful of men, MacDonnell somehow managed to get the gates shut amid ferocious hand-to-hand combat. Once the gates were closed again, MacDonnell's men shored them up with flagstones, carts and debris while the 40 or so French soldiers trapped inside fought on. They were all killed with the exception of an unarmed 11-year-old drummer boy. Hougoumont's 2,500 defenders successfully held out for the rest of the day against about 12,500 French attackers.

Left: *This sergeant is carrying a spontoon, which was used as a weapon, as well as a way of signalling orders and maintaining discipline*

Below: *Reproduction of Denis Dighton's 'Defence by the Coldstream Guards of the Chateau de Hougoumont'*

Illustration: Jean-Michel Girard - The Art Agency

Images: Alamy

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

One of the British army's oldest regiments has a 366-year history fighting for crown and country

Salamanca, Waterloo, Inkerman, Sevastopol, the Somme, Dunkirk, El Alamein, the First Gulf War… The Coldstream Guards' list of battle honours could almost be chapter headings in a comprehensive book about British military history.

With a tradition of rigid discipline that stems from its earliest days as a Republican guard in Cromwell's New Model Army, the Coldstreamers have proved themselves superior in combat and second to none (to borrow their own motto) when it comes to impressing on the parade ground.

FIGHTING NAPOLEON

THE GUARDS DEFEATED THE EMPEROR'S GRAND ARMÉE ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS DURING THE PENINSULAR CAMPAIGN AND ELSEWHERE

After fighting in the American War of Independence a decade previously, the regiment was deployed again during the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802), where it served in the disastrous Flanders campaign, as well as the more successful expedition to Egypt, helping to halt Napoleon's ambitions in the Middle East.

The Coldstreamers served again during the Peninsular War under the Duke of Wellington, between 1809-14. However, it was during the final campaign of the Napoleonic Wars that the Guards would face their toughest challenge yet: on the front line at the Battle of Waterloo.

THE GUARDS & THE GREAT WAR

THE COLDSTREAMERS WOULD DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES AGAIN AND AGAIN DURING WORLD WAR I, WINNING COUNTLESS BATTLE HONOURS AND INDIVIDUAL MEDALS

As one of the British Army's most prestigious regiments, the Coldstream Guards were among the first to be deployed to France at the outbreak of World War I. Fighting with incredible bravery, they nonetheless experienced shocking losses. At the First Battle of Ypres in 1914, one battalion (around 800 men) was virtually annihilated. Suffering terrible privations and dangers throughout the Western Front campaign, the Coldstreamers, however, distinguished themselves repeatedly during the battles at Mons, Loos, the Somme and at Passchendaele, where they captured several German positions.

Members of the Coldstream Guard pose beside a captured German artillery piece. These 'five-nines' gave Germany an advantage in firepower early in the war

COLDSTREAMERS IN THE CRIMEA

AS THE SECOND MOST SENIOR REGIMENT IN THE BRITISH ARMY, THE GUARDS CAN COUNT VICTORIA CROSS RECIPIENTS AMONG THEIR RANKS

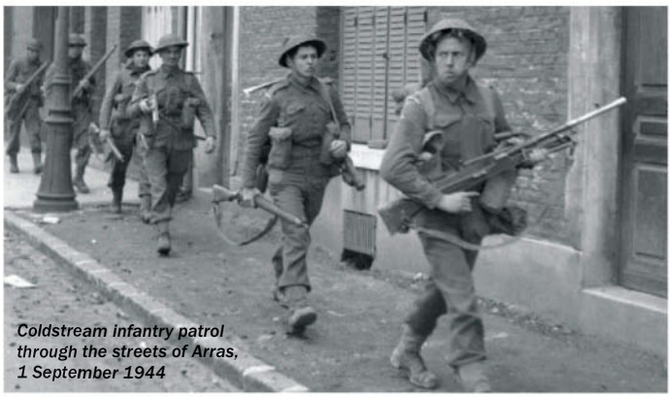
The Guards fought during the Crimean War of 1853-56, after which four of its men earned the newly instituted Victoria Cross. The era's combat uniform is similar to the ceremonial one worn today. Note how the buttons are sewn together in pairs to indicate that the Coldstreamers are the British army's second most-senior regiment; the most senior is the Grenadier Guards – the original bodyguards of the exiled Charles II – and whose buttons are sewn in singles.

***Right:** Colour Sergeant Absolom Durrant as part of the Coldstreamers during the Crimean War*

FOOT GUARDS OF WORLD WAR II

WHEN DEPLOYED IN THEIR ORIGINAL ROLE AS INFANTRYMEN, THE COLDSTREAMERS WERE AMONG BRITAIN'S MOST EFFECTIVE UNITS IN THE WAR AGAINST HITLER

Although the 1st and 5th battalions of the Coldstream Guards were drafted into the Guards Armoured Division, the rest remained as infantrymen – and a highly effective fighting force they were too. As well as serving in northern Europe, the Guards also saw action in the Western Desert Campaign under Montgomery, where they helped to defeat Rommel's Afrika Korps. They also took part in the invasion of Italy in 1943, earning numerous battle honours as they fought their way up the country.



Coldstream infantry patrol through the streets of Arras, 1 September 1944

SERVICE IN AFGHANISTAN

MORE THAN JUST A TOURIST ATTRACTION, THE MODERN COLDSTREAM GUARDS ARE STILL AMONG THE BRITISH INFANTRY'S FIGHTING ELITE

The regiment was deployed to the UK's most recent conflict in Afghanistan from 2007 to 2014. Although the weapons are the same as those used for ceremonial duties, the uniform is vastly different, reflecting the huge change in warfare over the centuries. The modern guardsman's kit reflects the need for a soldier to adapt to his environment in order to survive. Standing out is no longer considered an advantage, as the DP (disruptive pattern) camouflage combat smocks and trousers worn by the soldiers below demonstrates.

Guardsmen from Number three Company in the Babaji area of Helmand province, December 2009

O'Malley/REX/Shutterstock

MODERN-DAY CEREMONIAL COLDSTREAMER

THE ORNATE CEREMONIAL UNIFORM OF THE MEN WHO GUARD BUCKINGHAM PALACE IS ACTUALLY CAREFULLY CONSIDERED BATTLEDRESS FROM THE VICTORIAN ERA

Today, Coldstream Guards are used both for combat and ceremonial duties, and when employed for the latter a modern-day guardsman's attire is almost identical to his Victorian forebears. The famous bearskin hat adds an additional 18 inches to his height and was intended to make the soldier look taller – and therefore more intimidating – on the battlefield. His red tunic is coloured so not because it would mask blood, but because it made him more visible – which was considered an advantage when battles were fought more formally.

Made from around 11 layers of woollen felt, the tunic would have also have served as an early form of body armour, providing a degree of protection from musket balls, although its usefulness in this capacity obviously deteriorated with advances in firearm technology. The L85A2 assault rifle this guardsman is holding, for example, fires a high-velocity 5.56mm round that would go straight through such material.

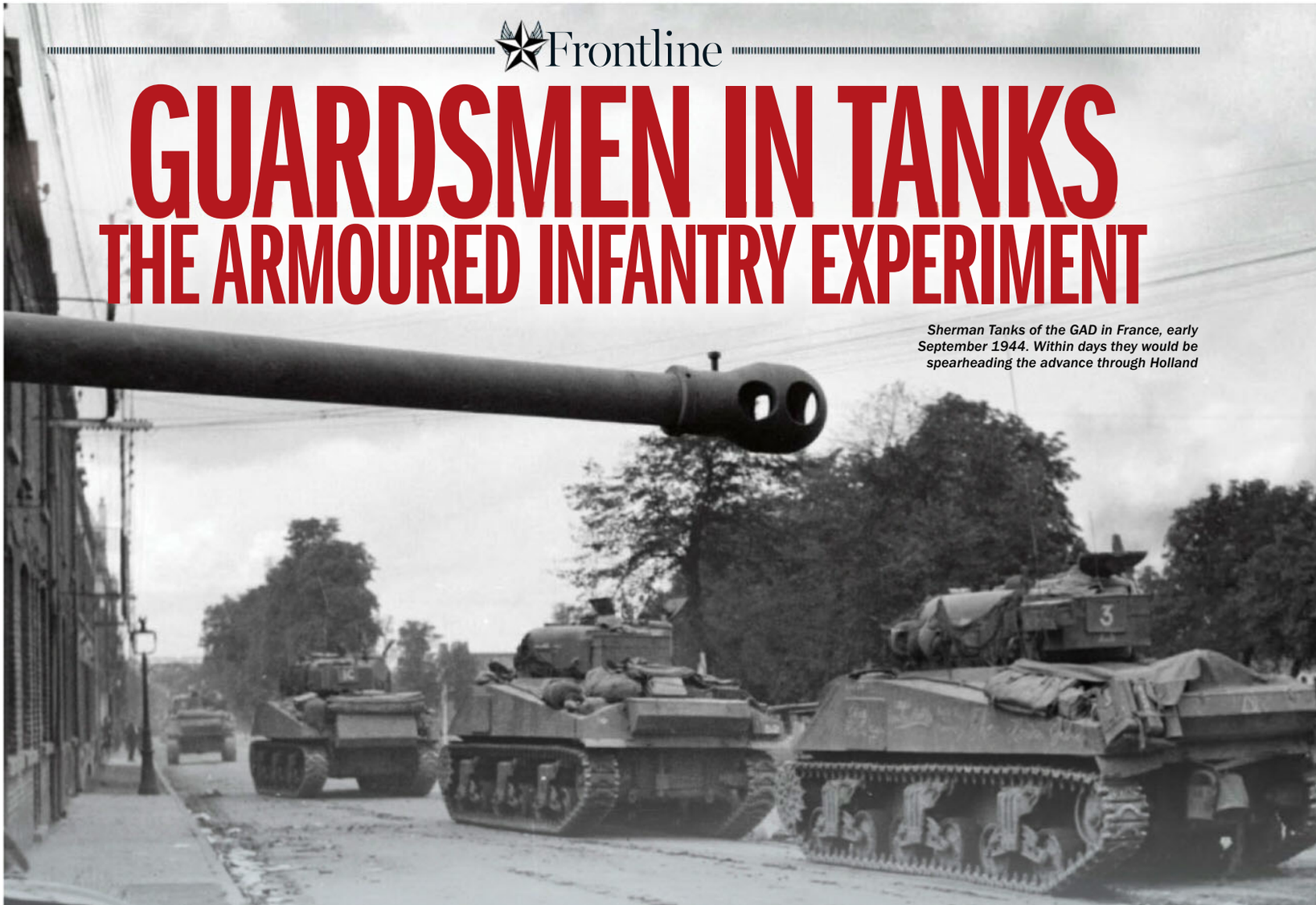
Right and below: As part of their duties, the Coldstream Guards also contribute to world-famous ceremonial occasions in London

"THE FAMOUS BEARSKIN HAT ADDS AN ADDITIONAL 18 INCHES TO HIS HEIGHT AND WAS INTENDED TO MAKE THE SOLDIER LOOK TALLER – AND THEREFORE MORE INTIMIDATING – ON THE BATTLEFIELD"

Images: Getty, Rex Features. Illustrations: Jean-Michel Girard – The Art Agency

GUARDSMEN IN TANKS

THE ARMOURED INFANTRY EXPERIMENT



Sherman Tanks of the GAD in France, early September 1944. Within days they would be spearheading the advance through Holland

At the height of World War II, men from the British Army's five regiments of Foot Guards were ordered to swap their battle dress for the baggy, formless overalls of a tankie

In June 1941, more than 2,000 men of the Coldstream Guards were told they were no longer infantrymen, but the first cohort of the Guards Armoured Division (GAD). As it transpired, they would also be the last.

The GAD had been formed largely in response to what the British Army had experienced at Dunkirk the year before, when seemingly unstoppable German panzers and aircraft had torn through France and chased it into the Channel amid a blitz of steel and shellfire. The future of warfare, it seemed, was mechanised, while the role of the infantryman – a key battlefield unit since ancient times – had been rendered redundant in a matter of weeks.

In the event, it turned out to be a total miscalculation. The guardsmen were ill-suited to service as tank troops. As the finest infantry regiments in the British Army, the guards traditionally had the pick of the crop when it came to recruits. In practical terms, this meant that its troops tended to be physically more powerful and much taller – the wrong shape for life inside in the cramped confines of a Sherman or Churchill tank.

There was also the mental aptitude. Regiments like the Coldstream Guards were built on centuries of tradition. Forged in conflicts like the Seven Years' War and the American War of Independence, and tempered in the later ones like those against Napoleon or the Russians in Crimea, tight military discipline was in their DNA. All that fighting in squares and thin red lines had seen to that. Guardsmen were famous for their scrupulous obedience to orders and the Coldstreamers – as the oldest of the lot – had provided the blueprint.

Merely keeping the GAD moving was an enormous logistical task

Handheld anti-tank weapons like the German panzerfaust, seen here, could blow a tank's turret off from 30 metres

Left: Many Foot Guards were ordered to join the first cohort of the GAD

Outdated Covenanter tanks were used to train the guards but did not see action overseas

© Alamy

"THE GUARDS WERE FINE REGIMENTS, THERE COULD BE NO DOUBT ABOUT THAT, BUT RIGID DISCIPLINE AND IMAGINATIVE THINKING RARELY GO HAND IN HAND"

Tank troops, as the German panzer units had proved again and again the previous summer, needed to be big on initiative if they were to be effective. The Guards were fine regiments, but rigid discipline and imaginative thinking rarely go hand in hand.

There was another downside to the formation of the GAD too – it robbed the British Army of some of the best infantrymen in its ranks, as its commander Field Marshal Montgomery was to discover when he led the British Army back onto the continent on D-Day three years after the GAD was formed. He soon realised that far from having no future on the modern battlefield, the humble foot soldier still had a role to play. With German air cover almost nonexistent and the thick hedgerows of Normandy's bocage tangling up the Allies, the panzerfaust-toting German infantry were a constant threat to British tank crews.

The GAD also required a good deal of logistical support to keep it rolling. To propel the 300 plus tanks in its ranks that landed on the Normandy beaches, it required 1,000 gallons of petrol to advance just one mile. That petrol had to be brought over from Britain, then transported to the front as the GAD advanced ever further into France, which required machinery and manpower that might otherwise have been employed actually fighting the Germans.

Once Allied forces did break out of France, the GAD's next major role was to act as the spearhead of the armoured drive through Holland as part of Operation Market Garden. This was Montgomery's audacious plan to lay a carpet of airborne troops across Holland that would seize vital bridges, including one across the Rhine, providing a gateway into Germany. The armoured part of the operation, with the GAD leading the way, was to then race up a single road linking up with US paratroopers at Eindhoven and Nijmegan, before finally relieving beleaguered British paratroopers at Arnhem. In the event, however, the armoured part of the operation fell short and thousands of British paratroopers were taken prisoner.

The GAD spent the rest of the war in mopping-up operations and was tellingly disbanded shortly after. Though the men who served in it had fought bravely, ultimately the GAD was a military experiment that failed.

617 SQUADRON DAMBU

The RAF's legendary bombing unit is not just renowned for the heroism of Guy Gibson's famous raid, but has also sunk a fearsome battleship, protected Britain from nuclear conflict and fought in the Iraq War

At 9.28pm on 16 May 1943, 19 Avro Lancaster Bombers took off from RAF Scampton in Lincolnshire at twilight under the utmost secrecy. Their mission was to deliver a unique weapon that would breach the walls of major dams in Germany's industrial heartland, causing major disruption. Until this night, there had been no bombs capable of such an attack, but an innovative aeronautical engineer named Barnes Wallis had developed 'Upkeep', a weapon that could bounce on water, avoid torpedo nets and then detonate below the surface against the dams' walls. Such an operation had never been attempted before and a new force had been assembled specifically for the task on 21 March 1943: 617 Squadron. Its first daring operation would fly it into the history books.

Although this elite unit of the Royal Air Force is known in history as the 'Dambusters', it went on to achieve other aerial feats of arms for the duration of World War II and beyond. Its operational service includes important roles in the sinking of German naval forces, ingenious diversionary tactics during the Normandy landings, acting as an effective deterrent during the Cold War and carrying out complex missile attacks during the invasion of Iraq. At all times during the squadron's active service, it was equipped with cutting-edge military technology and, while it is currently disbanded, it is in the process of reforming for 2018 when it will reassert its role as a major frontline player for the Royal Air Force.

617 takes to the skies

Even before the outbreak of war in 1939, the British Air Ministry had recognised that the Ruhr Valley in Germany was an important strategic target. The area was heavily industrialised and its dams had multiple uses for the German war effort, which included hydroelectric power, pure water for steel making and maintaining the levels of the canal system. If the dams could be breached, Germany's industrial heart would be severely disrupted, but the task ahead was formidable. Three dams, the Möhne, Eder and Sorpe, were picked out and of these, the Möhne was considered to be the primary

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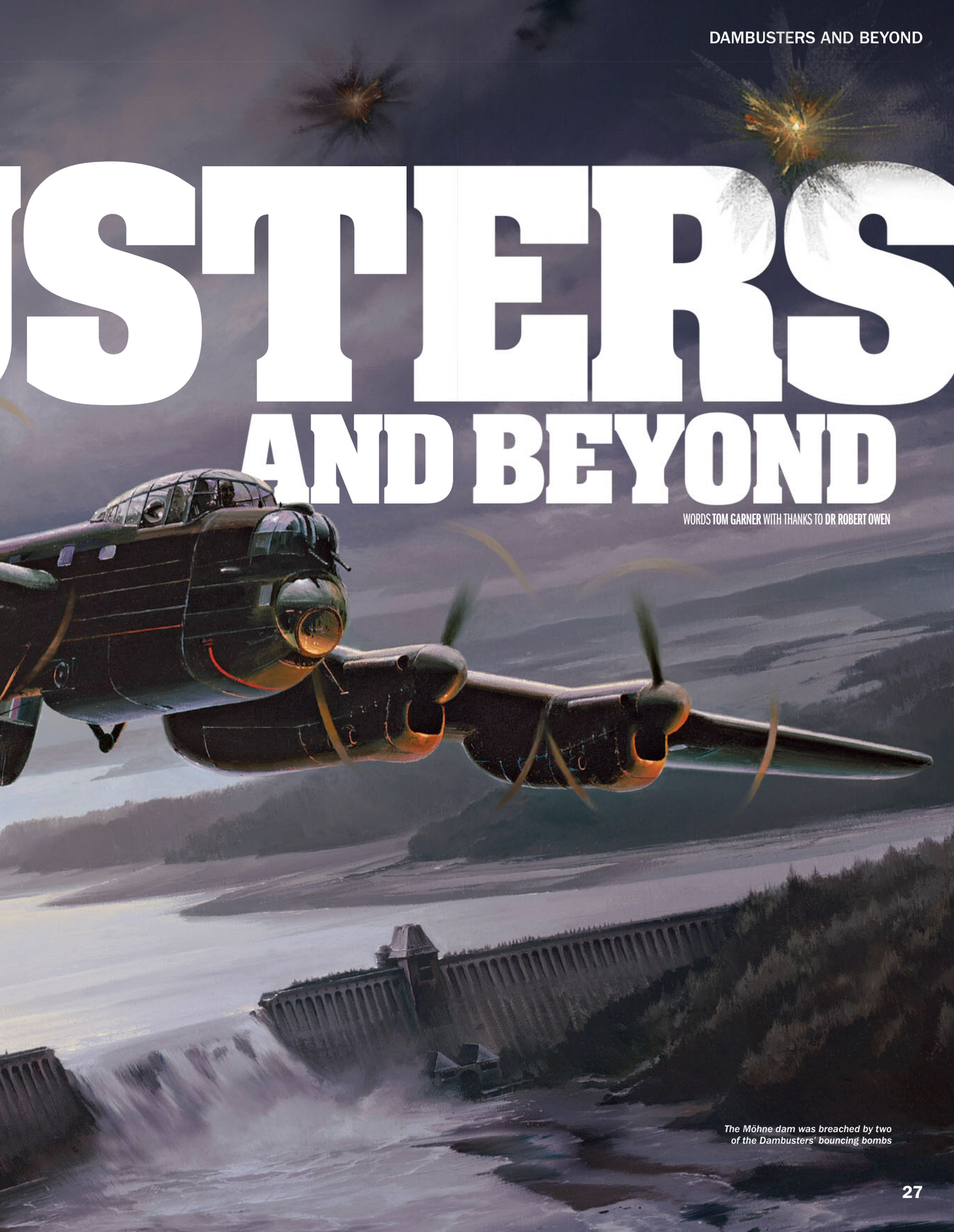
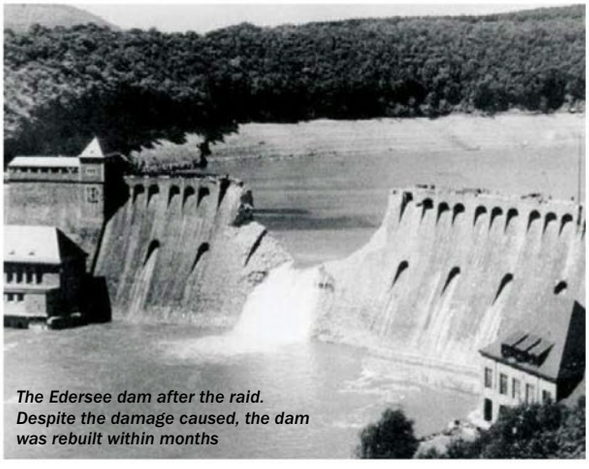
USTERS AND BEYOND

WORDS **TOM GARNER** WITH THANKS TO **DR ROBERT OWEN**



The Möhne dam was breached by two of the Dambusters' bouncing bombs

Air Vice-Marshal Ralph Cochrane, Group Captain John Whitworth and Guy Gibson discuss the raid with King George VI



The Edersee dam after the raid. Despite the damage caused, the dam was rebuilt within months

A Grand Slam bomb explodes near the Arnsberg viaduct. This raid, carried out on 19 March used an additional 5 Grand Slam and 13 Tallboy bombs

target. It was 130 feet high and 12 feet deep at its base. In order for a bomb to be effective, it had to explode directly in contact with the dam wall. This was where Barnes Wallis's famous 'bouncing bombs' came in, but only experienced pilots would be able to drop them. As well as the intricate technicalities involved in the attack, the bombers had to take in the difficulties of the Ruhr landscape. The Eder dam for example, had a winding reservoir that was bordered by steep hills and could only be approached from the north, while the Sorpe was flanked by a church spire that was in the path of the attacking aircraft.

The risk and danger involved in the audacious raid prompted Air Marshal Arthur Harris, the head of Bomber Command, to form a new squadron of experienced pilots. Initially known as 'X' but soon designated as '617 Squadron', Harris appointed 24-year-old Wing Commander Guy Gibson to lead. Despite his age, Gibson held four gallantry awards, had flown 71 bomber sorties and 99 night fighter sorties. He was permitted to pick men who had survived approximately 30 bombing raids but was the only man who knew the details of the upcoming raid. The pilots he chose came from all over the Commonwealth, including British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealander airmen. When the squadron formed on 21 March 1943, it was given less than two months preparation time. During this time the squadron trained over the dams of the Upper Derwent Valley in Derbyshire, Uppingham Lake and Abberton Reservoir in low-level flying, which was difficult for the pilots who had trained to fly their Lancaster bombers above 15,000 feet. On this occasion, they would have to fly at 150 feet (and in some places 60 feet), over water and at night. Statistically the odds were unfavourable.

Nonetheless, the raid went ahead, and on the night of 16-17 May, 19 Lancasters carrying 133 aircrew took off in three waves from RAF Scampton. Gibson led the first. At 6pm that evening, he had announced to his men in their final briefing: "We are going to attack the great dams of Germany." Despite their intensive training to fly at low height and deliver a bouncing bomb over water, this was the first time most of them had heard of their targets.

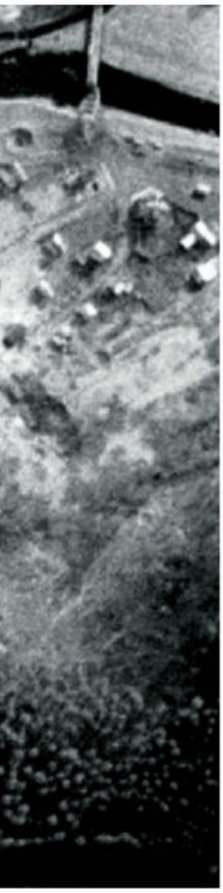
The route to and from the dams had to be flown at low level to avoid the German anti-aircraft defences, and most navigation after crossing the Dutch coast was done by map reading and dead reckoning. At 12.28am, Gibson's aircraft was the first to attack the Möhne, and he immediately came under heavy fire from the flak towers on the dam. After several failed attempts, where the bombs sank prematurely or bounced over the dam, the Möhne was hit directly in the centre and then again as millions of gallons of water poured through the breach and down the valley. Gibson ordered his men to follow him to the Eder.

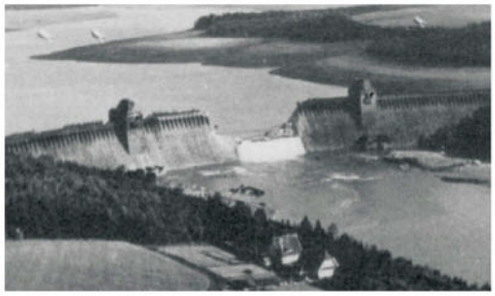
"ON THIS OCCASION, THEY WOULD HAVE TO FLY AT 150 FEET (AND IN SOME PLACES 60 FEET), OVER WATER AND AT NIGHT. STATISTICALLY, THE ODDS WERE UNFAVOURABLE"

Elsewhere, the Sorpe was being attacked. The pilots who assaulted this position had difficulties with the hilly terrain, mist and the troublesome church steeple. One pilot flew five separate approaches before dropping his bomb on the sixth attempt. Despite all the attempts made to breach the Sorpe, it remained intact.

There was more luck at the Eder. All of the aircraft had difficulty finding it in thickening mists but it was Gibson who finally located it. He fired a red flare to alert the other crews of its location and it took almost ten approaches before the dam was breached. With their job done, the Lancasters of 617 headed for home, albeit at a heavy cost. Of the 19 aircraft that had left Scampton, 11 had made attacks on the dams and eight had been shot down. Out of the 133 aircrew, 53 had been killed – which gave the raid a casualty rate of 40 per cent – while a further three had bailed out and been captured over enemy territory.

The resulting flooding from the breached dams covered a wide area and severely damaged or destroyed factories, power stations, roads and bridges. A large number of Ruhr towns were temporarily deprived of water and the Germans had to send in thousands of workers to repair the damage. This included over 7,000 workers who were diverted from building the Atlantic Wall defences against the future Allied invasion of Europe. This diversion would later help the Allies on D-Day. As a final blow, the raid caused German coal, food and ammunition production to fall, just as the Germans were about to mount their last considerable offensive on the Eastern Front.





Wing Commander Guy Gibson VC (far left) with fellow members of 617 Squadron at RAF Scampton. Operation Chastise turned Gibson into a celebrity and the raid gave the British a significant morale boost

***Left, top:** Smoke rises from a near miss on the Schildescher Viadukt. It would take four months and multiple raids to finally collapse the target*

***Left, middle:** A 617 Lancaster dropping a 'Grand Slam' bomb on the Arnsberg viaduct in Germany, 1945. These huge bombs were another imaginative creation of Barnes Wallis*

***Left, bottom:** The Möhne dam after it had been bombed by 617 Squadron. This photograph was discovered in German archives after the war*

Despite these achievements, it has latterly been argued that the raid was not as effective as popular history suggests. As well as the high casualty rates in 617 Squadron, at least 1,200 people were killed on the ground, with a significant number being forced labourers from occupied countries. The Germans also recovered reasonably quickly from the attacks and the dams were repaired within five months. Even Air Marshal Harris concluded that he had, "…seen nothing… to show that the effort was worthwhile except as a spectacular operation." If Harris felt that the raid was relatively insignificant, then he was a small voice in a sea of applause.

It is arguable that the true consequence of the raid was political and psychological. Winston Churchill was visiting USA at the time and capitalised on its success by referring to it in a speech to Congress. There was also significant coverage in British and American press and the airmen were elevated to hero status. 34 of the survivors were decorated at Buckingham Palace, with Gibson being awarded the Victoria Cross. The British public were given a significant morale boost, the likes of which had not been felt since the victory at El Alamein the previous year. The almost swashbuckling tale of British pluck and ingenuity in the face of insurmountable odds meant that the men of 617 Squadron were given a new nickname: The Dambusters.

D-Day deception

On its very first mission, 617 had literally exploded into legend, a feat not equalled before or since by any other fighting squadron. Its prominence was now assured and the unit was retained to continue performing highly specialised attacks, many of which employed huge bombs designed by Barnes Wallis. At first, 617 attempted to bomb the Dortmund-Ems Canal at low level in September 1943 but five aircraft were lost and the commanding officer who replaced Guy Gibson was killed. Such missions were not repeated afterwards and 617 concentrated on high-altitude precision bombing, which was essential for the use of Wallis's six-ton 'Tallboy' and ten-ton 'Grand Slam' deep-penetration, earthquake bombs.

"THE COMMANDING OFFICER, WING COMMANDER LEONARD CHESHIRE, PIONEERED A NEW LOW-LEVEL MARKING TECHNIQUE THAT AIMED TO IMPROVE ACCURACY AND MINIMISE CIVILIAN CASUALTIES"

In the run-up to D-Day, 617 attacked factories, V-weapon sites and communications targets in France. The commanding officer, Wing Commander Leonard Cheshire, pioneered a new low-level marking technique that aimed to improve accuracy and minimise civilian casualties when attacking targets in occupied territory. This was a novel concept but 617 also used deception tactics prominently displayed on D-Day itself. The Germans were aware that a continental invasion was imminent but they could not be certain of its location. For the Allies, it was impossible to hide the huge force prepared for Operation Overlord, but they worked hard to keep the Germans guessing where the invasion would take place. The Royal Navy and RAF carried out various diversions that did not involve the landing of troops but would be carried out at the same time as the actual landings.

As part of this huge deception, 617 was involved in Operation Taxable, an elaborate radar countermeasure. 617's task was to drop strips of metal foil known as 'chaff', which would interfere with German radar signals. They would be dropping chaff and co-operating with the Royal Navy to represent an invasion convoy approaching Antifer, north of Le Havre. Chaff was developed during World War II, and when it was picked up by radar, it either appeared as a cluster of primary targets or swamped the screen with swarming returns. 617's role in Operation Taxable was one of several similar missions carried out by the RAF for D-Day that involved both chaff (Operation Glimmer) and other deceptions, such as dummy parachute drops and motor launches (Operations Titanic and Mandrel). The RAF flew meticulous missions to deliver a constant stream of chaff, simulating a large naval force crossing the English Channel. These missions aimed to convince the Germans that there were more, larger invasions taking place further up the French coast, even as the first sightings of the Normandy landings were received.

The planned execution of Taxable was meticulous. Bombers would fly a racecourse pattern at right angles to the enemy coast, beginning at opposite ends and chasing each

THE BOUNCING BOMB

BARNES WALLIS'S MOST FAMOUS INVENTION WAS SCIENTIFICALLY INGENIOUS. IT REQUIRED GREAT SKILL AND PRECISION FROM RAF PILOTS IN ORDER TO SUCCESSFULLY DEPLOY IT

Apart from the intrepid bravery of the airmen of 617 Squadron, Operation Chastise is also famous for the weapon used to breach the Ruhr dams: the bouncing bomb. Code named 'Upkeep', the explosives were the brainchild of Dr Barnes Wallis who worked for the engineering company Vickers Armstrong. In 1942, he began working on plans for a bomb that could skip across water, initially developing ideas by bouncing marbles across a water tub in his back garden. Wallis was given access to research bodies and carried out large scale experiments involving exploding charges against model dams and destroying a real 180 foot high disused dam in Wales. He concluded that breaching the dams would not be easy and aimed to create a bomb that would explode on contact with the dam wall.

"THE BOUNCING BOMB ITSELF WAS A FUSION BETWEEN A DEPTH CHARGE AND A MINE THAT WEIGHED 9,250 POUNDS"

Meanwhile, he also had to persuade the sceptical authorities of the project's viability. He did not receive official approval until 26 February 1943. The timing was inconvenient because the best time to attack the dams was in spring when the reservoirs were full. Now Wallis had to design and produce the bombs in a very small time frame. He drew the first full-scale drawing of an Upkeep bomb on 27 February, only 11 weeks before the raid took place. There was also no modified aircraft available and so 617's training was largely improvised.

The bouncing bomb itself was a fusion between a depth charge and a mine that weighed 9,250 pounds. It contained 6,600 pounds of Torpex underwater explosive, along with three hydrostatic pistols, designed to detonate 30 feet below the surface. It measured less than five feet long and more than four feet in diameter and was held in the bomb bay of modified Lancaster bombers between twin-sprung callipers. The bay also contained a hydraulic motor that caused the bomb to backspin at a rate of 500rpm. This was to enable Upkeep to bounce across the water and avoid torpedo nets. When the bomb struck the dam wall, the backspin would cause it to stay in contact with the face of the dam as it sank. This would then focus the force of the explosion against the dam and would be sufficient enough to rupture the huge wall. On the night of 16 May, all of this complex science and engineering was still theoretical; it would take the skill of 617 Squadron to make Operation Chastise successful.

***Above:** An 'Upkeep' bouncing bomb attached to the bomb bay of Wing Commander Guy Gibson's Avro Lancaster during dropping trials at Manston, Kent in May 1943*

***Above and Below:** An Avro Lancaster from 617 Squadron practices dropping a bouncing bomb at Reculver bombing range, Kent in May 1943*

1 HIGH SPEED + LOW ALTITUDE = DANGEROUS

For the Möhne and Eder dams, the Lancaster's approach was 60 feet above the water, in the dark, flying at 220 miles per hour. However, the barometric altimeters cannot give an accurate reading. This is skilled but extremely hazardous work

2 LIGHTS IN THE DARK

At this low altitude, pilots cannot read their instrument panels in case they crash. Instead, each Lancaster carries two spotlights that meet on the water's surface at 60 feet. The navigator calls "up" or "down" to the pilot.

3 PREPARING FOR DEPLOYMENT

Once the spotlights have converged, the Lancaster is now at a right angle to the dam. Before being released, the bomb is rotated at 500rpm by a hydraulic motor and belt drive.

4 BOMBS AWAY!

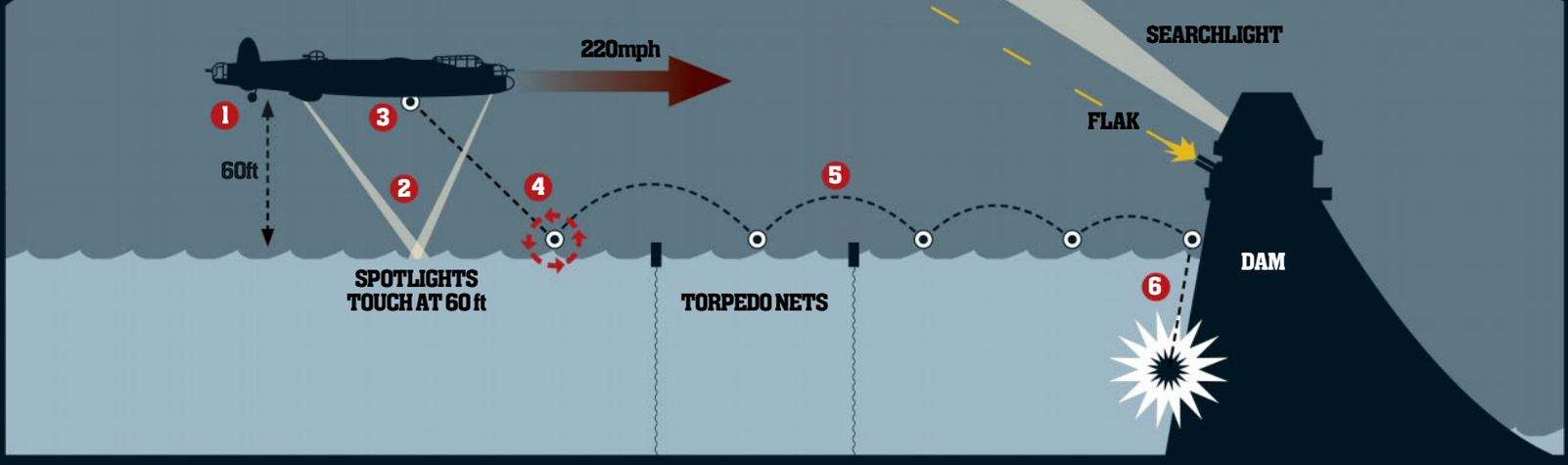
The bomb aimer uses a primitive homemade sight to wait for the right moment to release Upkeep. Once released, the bomb is hurtling towards the dam on a backspin.

5 SKIMMING TOWARDS DESTRUCTION

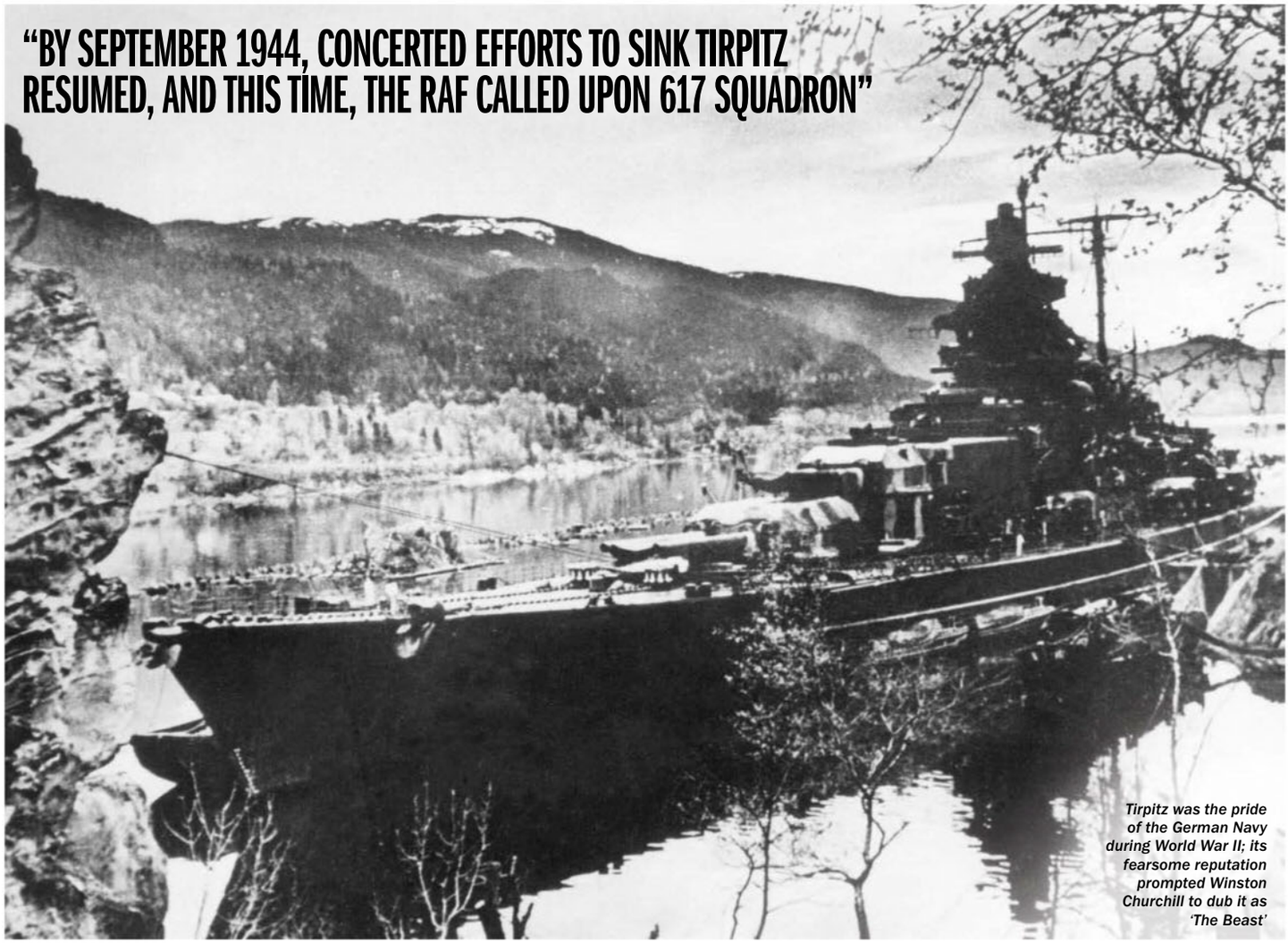
The backspin of the bomb enables it to bounce over the torpedo nets. When it strikes the dam, the backspin causes the bomb to sink downwards along the wall.

6 "AFTER ME, THE FLOOD"

The bomb is fitted with a 90-second fuse, so that if the hydrostatic mechanism fails, it will still detonate. Ideally this should happen as the bomb is sinking into the reservoir bed next to the dam. This should successfully breach its concrete walls.



"BY SEPTEMBER 1944, CONCERTED EFFORTS TO SINK TIRPITZ RESUMED, AND THIS TIME, THE RAF CALLED UPON 617 SQUADRON"



Tirpitz was the pride of the German Navy during World War II; its fearsome reputation prompted Winston Churchill to dub it as 'The Beast'

other around in a circuit lasting ten minutes, while constantly dropping chaff. As well as gradually moving the pattern closer to the coast, the crews also had to adjust to the changing wind direction. This was a very challenging task and it had to be painstakingly timed. The rectangular circuits were flown at 180 miles per hour, at 3,000 feet. The flights towards France lased two minutes and 30 seconds while dropping heavy strips of chaff, and the ones flying away lasted two minutes and ten seconds with lighter chaff drops. The timings were calculated in order to move the radar signature across the Channel at the prescribed speed of seven knots, and there was a light system where the aircrew dispensed the chaff every five seconds.

As an elite bombing unit, 617 was ideally placed to carry out Taxable, and eight Lancasters were requested for their exacting accuracy. Instead of the usual seven crew per aircraft, each aircraft had 12-13 men on board, including an additional pilot, navigator and extra manpower to help with dropping the chaff. At midnight on 6 June, the first eight Lancasters of 617 left RAF Scampton and flew tracks for two hours before being relieved by another eight planes. The second wave flew 500 feet above the original aircraft on their final circuit and had just 90 seconds to switch over. If this failed, then the radar picture would have faltered and the Germans would have known they were being duped. Remarkably, 617 successfully carried out the mission even though they were flying at night with no lights or radio. This trickery was assisted by naval aids below, with ships and launches using electronic jamming and noise recordings to simulate large ships.

***Left:** A 12,000-pound Tallboy bomb is hoisted to be loaded into a 617 Lancaster for a raid on a V-weapon site in France, 1944. Tallboy bombs also sunk the Tirpitz*

In terms of operational success, the deception missions varied. The Germans were mostly fooled by Operation Glimmer, which took place near the Pas-de-Calais. The German High Command issued an alert to expect landings near Calais and consequently 617's work in Normandy drew less attention. Nonetheless, it can be said that their presence helped in the German High Command's unrelenting stubbornness to react to the real invasion.

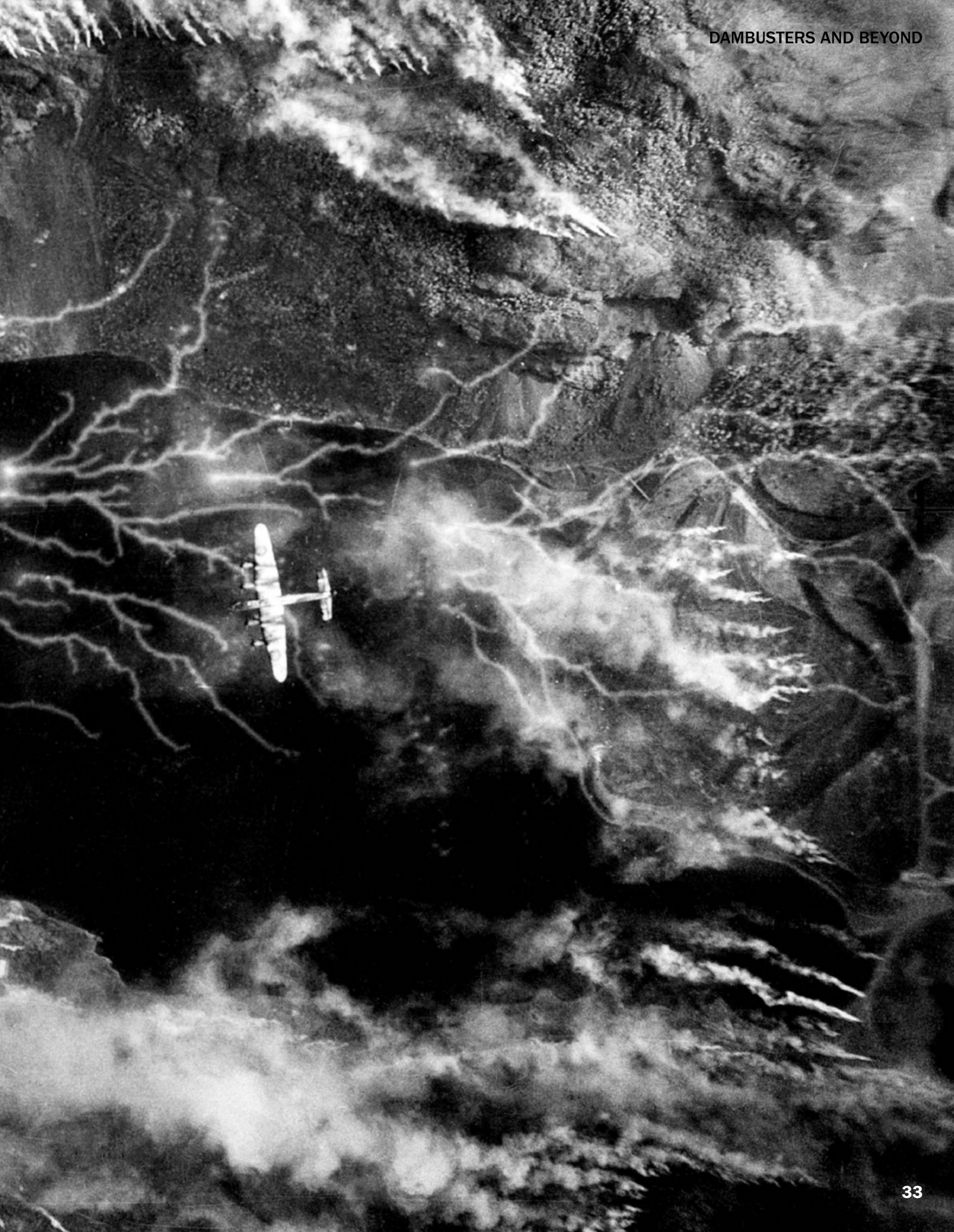
Sinking the Tirpitz

For the rest of the war, 617 conducted bombing raids on various targets, including U-boat and E-boat pens, bridges, factories, railway tunnels and V-weapon sites. A high point of the use of 'Tallboy' was the destruction of Germany's last significant naval threat to the Allies: the Tirpitz.

Commissioned in 1941, the 42,000-ton Tirpitz was the sister battleship to the infamous Bismarck, which had sunk HMS Hood. Tirpitz carried a main armament of eight 15-inch guns and had seen limited action, spending most of its career in Norwegian waters, but its location meant that it was a constant threat to Allied convoys bound for Russia. Consequently, the Allies had to maintain a large fleet in northern waters, and there had been repeated attempts to sink it by the Royal Navy and RAF but none had succeeded. By September 1944, concerted efforts to sink Tirpitz resumed and this time, the RAF called upon 617 Squadron.

A British air raid on the German battleship Tirpitz in Norway. This aerial shot shows Tirpitz (circled) setting off its smokescreen defences to confuse attacking bombers

"THE RAF HAD JUST CARRIED OUT ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PRECISION BOMBING ATTACKS OF WORLD WAR II, WITH 617 AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE OPERATION"



617 SQUADRON IN THE HANGAR

AS THE RAF'S PRE-EMINENT BOMBING UNIT, 617 HAS ALWAYS BEEN EQUIPPED WITH THE MOST TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED BOMBER AIRCRAFT THROUGHOUT ITS HISTORY

AVRO LANCASTER (1943-46)

Considered to be the best British heavy bomber of World War II, the Lancaster could carry 14,000 pounds of conventional drop bombs and the massive 22,000-pound 'Grand Slam' bombs. With a crew of seven, eight Browning machine guns for self-defence and four Rolls-Royce Merlin engines, the Lancaster was a fearsome aircraft.

LENGTH 21.1M TOP SPEED 272MPH CREW 7

LENGTH 23.8M TOP SPEED 319MPH CREW 7

AVRO LINCOLN (1946-52)

The Lincoln was Avro's post-war answer to the Lancaster, and outwardly appeared to be an enlarged version of its predecessor, with striking similarities including the same number of crew, engines and bomb capacity. However, it had a reduced number of machine guns and increased speed, range and ceiling.

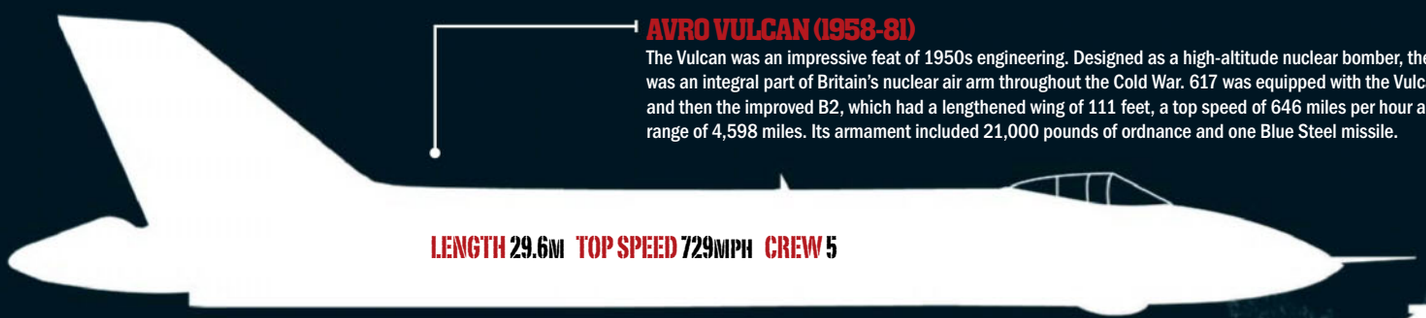
ENGLISH ELECTRIC CANBERRA (1952-55)

The Canberra was 617's first jet-powered aircraft and was a strike-minded medium bomber. Initially designed to replace the De Havilland Mosquito, it was a successful aircraft that stocked 61 RAF squadrons and had impressive specifications. It had a top speed of 580 miles per hour, which enabled it to outrun other contemporary jets and, with a crew of three, could carry ordnance of 8,000 pounds.

LENGTH 19.9M TOP SPEED 580MPH CREW 3

AVRO VULCAN (1958-81)

The Vulcan was an impressive feat of 1950s engineering. Designed as a high-altitude nuclear bomber, the aircraft was an integral part of Britain's nuclear air arm throughout the Cold War. 617 was equipped with the Vulcan B1 and then the improved B2, which had a lengthened wing of 111 feet, a top speed of 646 miles per hour and a range of 4,598 miles. Its armament included 21,000 pounds of ordnance and one Blue Steel missile.



LENGTH 29.6M TOP SPEED 729MPH CREW 5

PANAVIA TORNADO (1983-2014)

Tornados are a multirole aircraft capable of strike air support, counter-air attack, defence suppression, reconnaissance and long-range maritime attacks. 617 flew variants of the Tornado from 1983-2014 and often carried nuclear bombs, with each aircraft capable of carrying two. In 2013, 617's Tornado GR4s were decorated in special markings for the 70th anniversary of Operation Chastise.

LENGTH 16.7M TOP SPEED 1,490MPH CREW 2

LENGTH 15.7M TOP SPEED 1,200MPH CREW 1

LOCKHEED MARTIN F-35 LIGHTNING II (2018-)

In 2018, 617 Squadron will be the first operational RAF unit to receive the highly advanced F-35 Lightning II. The F-35 is the world's most advanced multirole fighter and its advanced stealth enables it to penetrate areas without being detected by radar. It can also take on all missions traditionally performed by specialised aircraft, such as air-to-air combat, air-to-ground strikes, electronic attack, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

These Vulcan bombers have anti-flash white colouring, designed to reflect thermal radiation

On 15 September, 27 Lancasters of 617 and Nine Squadrons flew from a Russian airfield to attack Tirpitz, which was anchoring in Kaafjord in northern Norway. 20 of these aircraft were carrying Tallboy bombs, and the mountainous terrain enabled the RAF to screen their approach from enemy radar. Consequently, the Tirpitz was caught by surprise. Some of the bombers were able to attack before its protective smokescreens were fully effective. One Tallboy broke through Tirpitz's forecastle and exploded in the water alongside – as a result its engines were damaged by the shock. All of the attacking Lancasters returned safely to Russia and the Germans decided that it was impractical to make Tirpitz fully seaworthy again, so it was moved south to Tromso as a floating heavy artillery battery.

The RAF was unaware of Tirpitz's diminished role and continued to hunt it relentlessly, attacking it again on 29 October. 37 Lancasters flew from Scotland with their mid-upper gun turrets removed and extra fuel tanks installed. This meant that the Tirpitz could now be directly reached from Britain, even though it was a 2,250-mile operation. On this particular occasion, unexpected cloud cover prevented Tirpitz from being directly hit and the Germans installed fighters nearby after the attack. Nevertheless, the RAF was not to be deterred.

The final attack on Tirpitz happened on 12 November 1944. 29 Lancasters of 617 and 9 Squadrons once again took to the skies from Scotland and this time the weather was clear. They were led by 617 Wing Commander James Tait. The bombers flew at 1,000 feet to avoid early detection by enemy radar prior to rendezvousing above a lake 100 miles south east of Tromso. The squadrons then climbed to a bombing height of between 12,000-16,000 feet before sighting Tirpitz 20 miles away. This time the smoke screen was not working and even more curiously the recently installed fighters did not appear, despite desperate calls for air cover. Tirpitz had to make do with its own anti-aircraft guns, supporting fire from shore batteries and two flak ships, which began to fire when the bombers were 13 miles away.

The first Tallboys narrowly missed their target but they were then followed by three rapid direct hits, the first one being delivered by Tait himself. A column of smoke and steam rose up to 300 feet and within minutes the ship started to list. It then suffered a huge explosion as an ammunition magazine went up and Tirpitz rolled over to port and capsized about ten minutes after the first bomb struck. By now, the ship had rotated about 125 degrees and only the hull was visible from the air. Between 950-1,200 crew members were killed during the sinking and there were only approximately 200 survivors. By contrast, none of the attacking aircraft were significantly damaged and all but one returned safely, with one aircraft landing in neutral Sweden.

The RAF had just carried out one of the most successful precision bombing attacks of World War II, with 617 at the forefront of the operation. Winston Churchill had dubbed the Tirpitz 'The Beast' for its persistent resistance

"617 WAS EQUIPPED WITH THE TECHNICALLY ADVANCED AVRO VULCAN B1 AND B2 BOMBERS AND ITS ASSIGNED ROLE WAS HIGH-LEVEL STRATEGIC BOMBING WITH A VARIED ARMAMENT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS"

Avro Vulcan B2s of 617 Squadron at RAF Cottesmore in 1975. Vulcans were Britain's primary nuclear air deterrent for over 20 years

***Left:** The Operation Telic Campaign Medal for service in Iraq. 617 Squadron earned this medal for attacking Saddam Hussein's high command centres*

***Right:** A Tornado GR4 from 617 Squadron, fitted with Storm Shadow cruise missiles directly under the fuselage in 2004. The squadron used this weapon a year previously during the invasion of Iraq*

to being sunk, but now that it had been destroyed there was great relief across the country. The secretary of state for air, Sir Archibald Sinclair, paid a visit to the squadrons the day after the attack and congratulated them on sinking, "…one of the toughest ships in the world." Nazi Germany had lost its last influential battleship, marking the end of the naval war in northern waters. It would also be the last high-profile raid of World War II for 617, but the squadron would continue to be at the forefront of RAF operations in the post-war period.

The Cold War and beyond

Following the end of World War II, 617's legendary Lancaster bombers were replaced by Avro Lincolns and then English Electric Canberras. On 15 December 1955, the squadron was disbanded but reformed shortly after on 1 May 1958 as part of Bomber Command's V-bomber force, which maintained Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent. 617 was equipped with the technically advanced Avro Vulcan B1 and B2 bombers and its assigned role was high-level strategic bombing with a varied armament of nuclear weapons.

Vulcan B2s (the squadron's key aircraft between 1961-81) could carry two nuclear weapons, but the delivery of free-fall bombs into the increasingly deadly defences of the USSR became a dangerous proposition. Consequently, 617's Vulcans were provided with Blue Steel missiles that could be fired up to 100 miles away from the target. Upon launching, the missile rocket engines would fire, boosting it to high altitudes and allowing the Vulcan crew to turn for home, leaving Blue Steel to fly on towards the target independently. Blue Steel remained the primary British nuclear deterrent until the introduction of the naval Polaris missiles. Vulcans were also equipped with WE177B nuclear free fall weapons. These had a yield of 400 kilotons, weighed 950 pounds and were 133 inches in length. It was the longest serving British nuclear weapon, with a service lasting 32 years, but thankfully 617 never had to deploy Blue Steel or the WE177B in anger.

617 was again disbanded on 31 December 1981 but reformed in January 1983 equipped with Panavia Tornados, which the squadron would fly updated variants of until 2014. It was in Tornado GR4s that 617 once again flew into pioneering combat as part of the invasion of Iraq. On 21 March 2003, 60 years to the day since 617 Squadron was formed, the RAF deployed a new weapon in a combat scenario for the first time during Operation Telic: the Storm Shadow Missile.

Storm Shadow is a European, air-launched cruise missile equipped with a powerful, British-developed conventional warhead. It was designed to attack important targets and infrastructure such as buried or protected command centres. Mission and target data is loaded into the weapon's main computer before the aircraft leaves on its mission. After being released up to 75 miles from a target, the weapon's wings deploy and the missile navigates its way to the target at low level using terrain profile matching and an integrated GPS system. In 2003, each missile cost £750,000, and it was rushed into service so it could be ready for the invasion. Its deployment was so secret that it was moved around at nighttime. Tornado GR4s were ideal ground attack aircraft and 617 Squadron was chosen to carry out 'a historic mission'.

The squadron was based at Ali Al Salem in northern Kuwait and was ordered to use Storm Shadow to penetrate the heavily reinforced bases of Saddam Hussein's high command. Like the Dambusters before them, 617 would be using a new sophisticated bomb for the first time. The RAF detachment commander, Group Captain Simon Dobb, felt uneasy: "It was untried in an operational environment, and was a hearts-in-mouth operation for us because we had never flown with the real thing and had no idea how well it would work." The Tornados took off with a full payload of Storm Shadows at the beginning of the aerial bombardment of Baghdad. Soon after crossing the Iraqi border, an aircraft flown by Squadron Leader 'Nobby' Knowles and Flight Lieutenant Andy Turk was locked on to by a surface-to-air missile and had to ditch its fuel tanks. Dobb recalled: "We were flying to targets north of Baghdad. Storm Shadows are heavy at 1,350 kilograms each and we used more fuel. Nobby and Andy were fuel critical so we let them in first to fire their missiles and return home. Then, as we entered our attack run, we too came under missile attack. We were targeted by what I think was an Iraqi SA2 missile." Knowles and Turk had to take evasive action before continuing their mission. Dobb said of the mission: "We were operating in a high-threat environment. Looking back I can say I was nervous, and I was excited, not in a joyful sense, but because I knew we were making history."

Early assessments of the attack suggested that the Storm Shadow missiles had hit their intended targets with pinpoint accuracy. 60 years to the day that Wing Commander Guy Gibson had flown over Germany's dams with his 'bouncing bombs', 617 Squadron had once again proven its reputation.

Although 617 Squadron disbanded in 2014, it is currently in the process of being reformed. Equipped with the latest F-35 Lightning multirole stealth fighter, the squadron will once again take to the skies in January 2018 to continue its work as one of the most elite squadrons in the Royal Air Force.

FURTHER READING

- **THE LAST BRITISH DAMBUSTER** GEORGE 'JOHNNY' JOHNSON (EBURY PRESS, 2015)
- **617: GOING TO WAR WITH TODAY'S DAMBUSTERS** TIM BOUQUET (ORION, 2014)
- **RETURN OF THE DAMBUSTERS: WHAT 617 SQUADRON DID NEXT** JOHN NICHOL (WILLIAM COLLINS, 2016)
- **DAM BUSTERS: THE TRUE STORY OF THE INVENTORS AND AIRMEN WHO LED THE DEVASTATING RAID TO SMASH THE GERMAN DAMS IN 1943** JAMES HOLLAND (GROVE PRESS, 2013)

Images: Getty

"IT WAS IN TORNADO GR4S THAT 617 ONCE AGAIN FLEW INTO PIONEERING COMBAT AS PART OF THE INVASION OF IRAQ"

Two Tornado GR4s of 617 Squadron pull away from a KC-135 Stratotanker after refuelling in 2006

MEET THE PILOT

LAWRENCE 'BENNY' GOODMAN

ONE OF THE LAST SURVIVING BRITISH 617 SQUADRON PILOTS FROM WWII DESCRIBES HIS EXPERIENCES ATTACKING THE TIRPITZ, ENCOUNTERING GERMAN FIGHTER PLANES AND BOMBING HITLER'S ALPINE RETREAT

Born in 1920, Goodman joined the RAF in 1940 and joined 617 in 1944 as a pilot with the rank of flight lieutenant. He took part in 30 operations with the squadron, attacking everything from U-boat and E-boat pens to viaducts, railway bridges, dams, battleships and even Hitler's infamous 'Eagle's Nest'. He left the RAF in 1964 as a squadron leader. Now in his mid-90s, he recalls his extraordinary flying experiences.

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE IN ATTACKS ON THE TIRPITZ IN OCTOBER 1944?

It was rather small, from about 20,000 feet. As far as the pilot was concerned, the bomb aimer dictated your course. Once we had started the run in, he controlled you as he was focused on the target. He adjusted my course from his bombsight so that we could try to keep one or two degrees of the direction he wanted.

My raid was the second attempt to sink the Tirpitz and it was rather cloudy. We had a great deal of trouble spotting the ship, big though it was. It was not only cloudy but the Germans put up a smoke screen. My bomb aimer finally saw it but the trip itself was called off. Although he dropped the bomb, I don't think it had much effect. We didn't encounter any fighters but we later learned that they had watched us going over the airfield, but they decided that we were transport or cargo planes from the Luftwaffe carrying supplies, so they didn't bother.

ON 12 JANUARY 1945, YOU WERE ATTACKED BY GERMAN FIGHTER PLANES WHILE DROPPING TALLBOY BOMBS ON SUBMARINE PENS AT BERGEN. WHAT ARE YOUR MEMORIES OF THAT EXPERIENCE?

We did come under fire sometimes and some trips, like Bergen, were bad. It was a daylight raid and we were after the ports there. We had a fighter escort but they went down to deal with the heavy flak. As they did, a mixed squadron of Focke-Wulf 190s and Me109s came up and played a little bit of havoc with us. Several of the squadron were shot down or damaged but we did bomb. When you're in the moment, quite a lot of things go through your mind. The main thing is, particularly as the pilot of the aircraft, you must keep cool and make sure everybody else does too, but I never encountered any panic among the crew ever. Discipline was maintained because you were trained for that. We were pretty lucky.

HOW DID IT FEEL TO BE FOLLOWED BY A ME262 FIGHTER?

When we bombed Hamburg on a daylight raid, about 10-20 minutes after we left the target we saw a Me262, which was the latest jet fighter. I'd never seen one before and I think very few of us had. I must say it was more than a surprise to have my flight engineer nudge me in the ribs and nod his head towards the starboard side. I didn't look the first time as I thought he was indicating the fuel gauges. He did it again more vigorously so I looked up and was amazed to see the latest German jet on our starboard wing.

That didn't please me to say the least and several things went through my mind such as "What do I do?" We had an evasion tactic called the 'Five Group Corkscrew' but this aircraft was sitting by us and I'm sure his ability to corkscrew in the air as a fighter would have been far more than flying a bomber, so I dismissed that immediately. We had no mid-upper turret; he could see that, so he knew he wasn't going to be fired on. He just sat there for what felt like hours, but the flight engineer later told me it was just under a minute. There was no comradeship in the air, we didn't salute each other or wave. He was staring at us and we back at him, I was wondering what the hell to do of course. Fortunately, I don't know whether he ran out of ammunition or not but he had been firing at another aircraft of our squadron and hadn't hit that either. He was either a new pilot or new to the jet, but as far as we were concerned, it was a lucky escape.

"THE MAIN THING IS, PARTICULARLY AS THE PILOT OF THE AIRCRAFT, YOU MUST KEEP COOL AND MAKE SURE EVERYBODY ELSE DOES TOO, BUT I NEVER ENCOUNTERED ANY PANIC AMONG THE CREW EVER"

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE IN THE ATTACK ON HITLER'S MOUNTAIN RETREAT NEAR BERCHTESGADEN IN 1945?

We had no idea it was going to be the last operation of the war but I know that we certainly destroyed the SS barracks at Berchtesgaden. We were the first of eight aircraft to bomb, so anything could have happened behind us, but I don't think Berchtesgaden itself was damaged. Certainly the barracks were shattered as far as we could see. There was quite a lot of destruction, I don't quite know who hit it but I would never claim any individual success, we always did it as a squadron. It didn't feel symbolic at the time but we realised what it meant to Hitler and the German people having it bombed.

***Below:** An aerial photograph taken during 617 operations over Bergen harbour, Norway, circa 1940*

***Below:** The Me262, nicknamed the Schwalbe or Swallow, was the world's first jet fighter*

***Below:** Aerial photo taken during the raid on Hitler's chalet complex and the SS guard barracks near Berchtesgaden*

BORODINO

In what was the bloodiest single day's battle before the Somme campaign, Napoleon received the sharpest lesson in the limits of glory

RUSSIA 7 SEPTEMBER 1812

WORDS **TOM GARNER**

This scene of the battle was painted by a French staff officer called Louis Lejeune who fought on the day. He was scathing of Napoleon's conduct at Borodino

On 28 October 1812, the dispirited Grande Armée passed through the village of Borodino during a humiliating retreat from Moscow. Here their morale reached new lows, for this was the site of an exceptionally bloody battle that they had fought nearly two months previously. The battlefield had not yet been cleared of its dead and the corpses had been partially eaten by animals. An eyewitness, Adrien de Mailly, described the sight as, "… some grotesque travesty making fun of misery and death – it was odious!" The gruesome scene was symbolic of one of the most hideous battles in history.

Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Russia in 1812 was an exceptionally dramatic campaign that would decide the fate of Russia and Napoleonic Europe. It is famous for the retreat from Moscow, where the Grande Armée was reduced to a husk of its former self when thousands of soldiers froze to death during the infamous Russian winter. Nonetheless, the army had suffered catastrophe even before it reached Moscow – on the battlefield of Borodino. This mighty clash, which was immortalised in Leo Tolstoy's novel *War And Peace* and Pyotr Tchaikovsky's musical piece the *1812 Overture*, is perhaps the most pyrrhic of all victories and it marked the beginning of Napoleon's decline.

The master of Europe

The road to Borodino lies in the strained diplomacy following French successes. Napoleon fought the Russians to the negotiating table following their heavy defeat at Friedland in 1807. At the Treaty of Tilsit in June 1807, he imposed his will on both the king of Prussia and Tsar Alexander I. The Russians had to accept French hegemony in central Europe and surrender their Mediterranean possessions, but most importantly they had to join the "Continental System", Napoleon's blockade of Britain that banned the import of British goods into European countries that were allied to or dependent on France. His plan was to commercially squeeze Britain into submission, but in the process Russia was highly provoked. Trade with Britain was important to the Russian economy, so in 1810 the Tsar resumed trading with the British.

Relations between France and Russia steadily deteriorated with Napoleon coming to believe that Alexander was preparing to make war. Although this was not in fact the case, the slide to conflict was irreversible as the two proud monarchs became increasingly frustrated with the other's intentions. Eventually Napoleon's pride got the better of him and in early 1812 he amassed a huge army that he intended to march into Russia in order to re-impose his will on Alexander. Napoleon was taking a huge gamble in provoking a largely unnecessary war with Russia and the resulting campaign would have huge consequences for all concerned.

For the invasion, Napoleon put together one of the largest forces in history. The "Grande Armée" ("Great Army") numbered between 450,000-600,000 men and was gathered from all parts of Europe. The majority of the troops were French but there were large contingents

from all over France's new domains, including 95,000 Poles and 81,000 Germans. The reason for its enormous size was that after his study of Charles XII of Sweden's failed invasion of Russia in 1709, Napoleon concluded that he needed at least 500,000 men and a huge stockpile of supplies for a successful campaign. Despite this, he couldn't control this many men in a single force, and the army split into three for the advance into Russia. Each would be many miles apart with Napoleon commanding the central force.

In late June 1812, French forces crossed the River Niemen into Russian territory and the invasion began. Facing them was a Russian army of approximately 409,000 regulars, with 211,000 in the front lines. Unlike the Grande Armée, the Russians had no legendary figurehead to rally around, and their leaders frequently quarrelled and contradicted one another. Initially the Russians were commanded by the minister of war, Barclay de Tolly, who was competent but unfairly mistrusted by his peers for being a 'foreigner' (he had distant Scottish-German ancestry). Other key players were the popular Georgian Prince Pyotr Bagration and the veteran Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov, who was highly experienced but dangerously sluggish. All three would play critical roles in the battle to come.

A chaotic campaign

The campaign started to go wrong immediately for Napoleon. Advancing from Vitebsk, he hoped to catch the Russian army in the open, but it kept retreating while the Grande Armée marched hundreds of miles away from its nearest supply base at Kovno. The French supply lines became overstretched, wreaking havoc among Napoleon's troops. The central force under the emperor's direct command had numbered 286,000 men when it crossed the Niemen in June, but by September, the harsh rigours of the campaign had reduced that number to just over 161,000 men. These huge losses did not bode well for the future.

Nevertheless, Napoleon did catch up with the Russians 68 miles west of Moscow, near to the village of Borodino, in September. From the Russian perspective this was reluctantly intentional. It was clear that Napoleon was aiming for Moscow in order to enforce his will on Tsar Alexander, who was ensconced at St Petersburg. The Russians had adopted a scorched-earth policy to deprive the Grande Armée of supplies, but now political pressure was forcing them to make a stand against the "Corsican Ogre". Consequently, the Russian army halted at Borodino and constructed hastily-built earthworks called fleches, which would help the artillery bombard the Grande Armée.

The Russians built three fleches, each between 1.5 and 2 metres tall and of varying shapes – two had four sides, while another was shaped like an arrowhead. However, these defences were small compared with the Great Redoubt in the centre of the Russian line. Facing towards the west, this had 72-metre-long shoulders that met in the middle at a 100-degree angle, was protected by a ditch with extra pits to stop horses, and had 18-24 cannon. As the battlefield was relatively small, consisting of small hills, brooks and the River Kalatsha, these earthworks would prove decisive. The village of Borodino itself sat on the north bank of the Kalatsha, to the east was Gorki and Utitsa was on the southern flank. In the centre was Semeonovskoie, positioned on a hill between the Great Redoubt and the fleches – although its wooden buildings were dismantled before the battle.

These fortifications gave a false sense that the Russians were well prepared, but in reality their leadership was in complete disarray. De Tolly had recently been demoted by Kutuzov and Bagration was left dissatisfied with both of his superiors. Kutuzov, although highly experienced and popular with his troops, was almost 67 years old and incapable of confident decision-making in the field. He commanded between 154,000-157,000 troops but it was unclear how they would perform in the field against the Grande Armée.

Napoleon's troops themselves were in a bad condition. At a roll call at Gzhatsk on 2

OPPOSING FORCES

GRAND ARMEE	VS	IMPERIAL RUSSIAN ARMY
LEADER		LEADERS
Emperor Napoleon I		Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov
TROOPS		TROOPS
128,000-134,000		154,000-157,000
CANNON		CANNON
584		640

French soldiers attack in Russia. Their splendid uniforms and discipline disguised the fact that most troops suffered from severe hunger and disease for most of the campaign

September, only 128,000 men answered the muster. There were about 6,000 straggling troops who would be able to catch up but this meant there were only 134,000 men prepared for battle. A French grenadier remembered the underfed troops in his army, "If General Kutuzov had been able to put off battle for several days, there is no doubt he would have vanquished us without a fight. The enemy was a vicious hunger which was destroying us."

There were similar sentiments on the night before the battle on 6-7 September. Lieutenant Heinrich Vossler recalled, "…a miserable plate of bread soup oiled with the stump of a tallow candle was all I had to eat on the eve of the big battle. But in my famished condition even this revolting dish seemed quite appetising." Many like Colonel Boulart, simply felt despair: "If we are beaten, what terrible risks will we not run! Can a single one of us expect to return to his native country?" Even Napoleon remarked to one of his generals that his army was in bad shape when he said: "poor army, it is much reduced." By contrast, the better-fed Russians were looking forward to the fighting, like Lieutenant Nikolai Mitarevsky: "I was eager to take part in a great battle, to experience all the feelings of being in one, and to be able to say afterwards that I had been in such a battle."

To boost morale, Napoleon issued a proclamation that stated: "Soldiers! This is the battle you have looked forward to so much! Now victory depends on you: we need it. Conduct yourselves as you did at Austerlitz… and may the most distant generations cite your conduct on this day with pride. Let it be said of you: 'He was at this great battle under the walls of Moscow!'" Kutuzov issued a more earthy

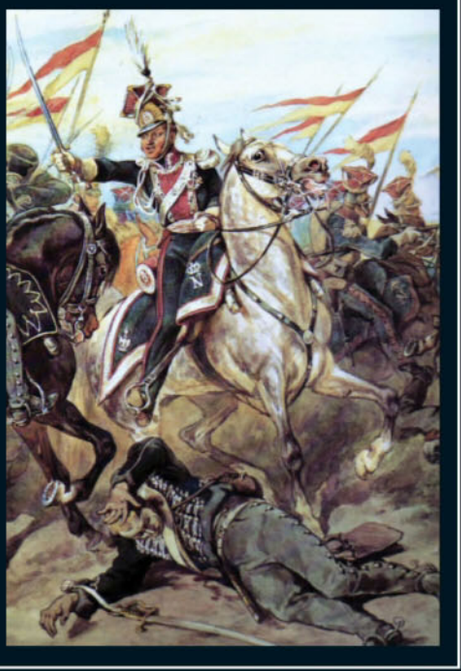
THE GRANDE ARMÉE: AN INTERNATIONAL FORCE

THE HUGE INVADING FORCE WAS A MELTING POT OF NATIONALITIES, MAKING THE 1812 CAMPAIGN A TRULY CONTINENTAL WAR

The Grande Armée is traditionally seen as being an exclusive French force, but in reality it was cosmopolitan and represented all the European nations that were either occupied by, or allied to, Napoleon's empire. Consequently, although the majority of troops were French, it also contained soldiers from the German states, Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands, the Italian peninsula, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland and Croatia. All nationalities were commanded by French generals and imbued with French military culture, with the exception of the Poles, Austrians and Prussians.

The Poles were the largest non-French contingent, numbering 95,000 men, and were enthusiastic allies against the Russians. There were also 81,000 Germans, who were split in their loyalties. None had much love for the French, but the Germans who came from Napoleon's enforced 'Confederation of the Rhine' were mostly antagonistic towards the 20,000 serving Prussians, but all were keen to roll the Russians out of Europe.

Many of the non-French contingents came from occupied territories and resented being part of the army. Lieutenant von Wedel wrote: "There were many who, in their heart of hearts, wished the Russians success." However he also conceded the power of Napoleon's presence, "Whatever their personal feelings may have been there was nobody who did not see in him the greatest and most able of all generals. The aura of his greatness subjugated me as well and I, like the others, shouted, 'Vive l'Empereur!'"



***Right:** Soldiers of the 1st Light Polish Cavalry Regiment of the Imperial Guard. At Borodino this regiment was kept in reserve, but 95,000 Poles served in the Grande Armée*

Russian Cossack cavalry during the French invasion. A Russian cavalry charge at Borodino distracted Napoleon and halted his deployment of the Imperial Guard, which influenced the outcome of the battle

Napoleon near Borodino. The emperor sat in a chair and seemed distracted for most of the day while the battle raged in the near distance. This was not the dynamic general who had caused Europe to tremble

statement. “Boys, today it will fall on you to defend your native land; you must serve faithfully and truly to the last drop of blood. I am counting on you. God will help us! Say your prayers!”

An eruption of death

At 6am on 7 September, the French cannon opened up and the Russians immediately answered. Across the compact battlefield, over 1,000 guns were firing in a cannonade that would last all day. The French grande batterie pounded the fleches, which threw up swirling dust that mixed with smoke to create a confusing atmosphere with limited visibility. Despite this murderous exchange of fire, Napoleon’s stepson Prince Eugène, on the Grande Armée’s left flank, advanced with his division of French-Croat infantry who swept the Russians out of Borodino village before occupying it. Two more of Eugène’s divisions crossed the River Kolocha but were pushed back.

To the south, Marshal Davout launched two divisions against the fleches after a half-hour artillery bombardment, and two were taken after fierce hand-to-hand fighting. The defenders here lost 3,700 out of 4,000 men in the space of two hours. Tragically, the fleches became death traps for the new occupiers, who found their backs to the walls of the defences and vulnerable to Russian counterattacks. Over the next three hours, the fleches were stormed, captured and retaken several times as both sides threw in reinforcements. There were 70,000 men fighting for the fleches and the engagements became so intense that bayonets were used instead of muskets. General Jean Rapp recalled: “I had never seen such carnage.”

Thousands were left dead among the fleches as attacks and counterattacks ebbed and flowed. At around 10am, Bagration was mortally wounded in the leg while rallying his troops and shortly afterwards the French cleared the fleches. Nonetheless, the Russians did not give up easily, as Captain Lubenkov later recalled: “It was a fight between ferocious tigers, not men. Once both sides had determined to win or die where they stood, they did not stop fighting when their muskets broke, but carried on, using butts and swords in terrible hand-to-hand combat.”

The village of Semeonovskoie was now in French hands, and Marshals Ney and Murat demanded reinforcements to secure victory, but Napoleon was unresponsive. He was in uncharacteristically bad form, and for most of the day sat in a chair observing the battlefield from a distance. The smoke and dust clouds obscured his view and instead of riding closer to observe events, he silently dismissed reporting officers and stuck to viewing progress through a telescope. This conduct did not impress his subordinates, including a staff officer called Louis Lejeune who noted in his diary: “We were all surprised not to see the active man of Marengo, Austerlitz etc. We did not feel satisfied; our judgements were severe.”

Meanwhile, the leadership was no better on the Russian side. Kutuzov’s command was lethargic; he had no coherent strategy, spent most of the battle at his headquarters at Gorki reacting to appeals and bad reports and often deferred to Quartermaster General Karl von Toll saying “Karl, whatever you say, I will do.” Carl von Clausewitz observed: “He appeared

08 **A WEARY STALEMATE**
The French occupy the Russians' biggest fleche but are expelled by midday. Poniatowski's attack is halted on the extreme right wing and the Russians wreak havoc in the rear of Prince Eugène's corps, but neither side yields significant results.

09 **NAPOLEON HOLDS BACK THE GUARD**
French marshals repeatedly call for reinforcements to take the Great Redoubt. Napoleon is advised to commit the Imperial Guard but he declines. A Russian appearance on his left flank hardens his resolve and yet, at a critical juncture, Napoleon does nothing. The Grande Armée does not move for two hours.

10 **THE GREAT REDOUBT FALLS**
At 3pm, the French launch an attack against the Great Redoubt and it is taken. Barclay de Tolly directs a Russian defence behind the Redoubt and the French fall back to the earthworks. The bombardments continue until the Russians withdraw. At 6pm, the guns fall silent.

“ONCE BOTH SIDES HAD DECIDED TO WIN OR DIE, THEY DID NOT STOP FIGHTING WHEN THEIR MUSKETS BROKE”

In this painting by Alexander Yuriyevich Averyanov, Prince Bagration can be seen encouraging his men forward during the battle

After Borodino, and the dispiriting occupation of Moscow, the Grande Armée froze to death on the long retreat to safety. Fewer than 35,000 Frenchmen returned to France

Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov. This veteran commander had possibly suffered from brain damage after a severe head wound he sustained in 1774, making his erratic leadership at Borodino controversial

Above: On 31 March 1814, the armies of Russia and Prussia were the first foreign armies to enter Paris since the English during the Hundred Years' War nearly 400 years previously

RUSSIA'S REVENGE

NAPOLEON'S FAILURE ENERGISED THE RUSSIANS TO PUSH THE EMPEROR ALL THE WAY BACK TO THE FRENCH CAPITAL

Despite being defeated, the baptism of fire at Borodino gave the Russian army a confidence that it would not lose for the rest of the Napoleonic Wars. The Grande Armée's misfortunes went from bad to worse, starting with the failed occupation of Moscow and then the disastrous retreat. Throughout this time, the Russians grew in strength while Napoleon lost hundreds of thousands of men and his aura of invincibility that had once terrified Europe. Dowager Empress Maria Fyodorovna said, "He is no longer an idol, but has descended to the rank of men, and as such, he can be fought by men."

Throughout 1813, the Russians pushed into Europe and persuaded other powers to turn against France. Prussia and Austria, both reluctant allies of Napoleon, declared war on him in March and August respectively. Although Napoleon often defeated the new coalition, he was now on the back foot and was comprehensively defeated at Leipzig on 16 October. Paris itself fell on 31 March 1814 and Tsar Alexander rode into the capital to surprising acclaim. A Russian officer, Pavel Pushin wrote, "All of them expressed genuine happiness, shouting, 'Vive Alexander!' Just yesterday these same people were yelling, 'Vive Napoleon'." The wheel had come full circle and Napoleon abdicated on 6 April.

destitute of inward activity, of any clear view of surrounding occurrences, of any liveliness of perception, or independence of action." Kutuzov rode out to observe the battle only once and apparently moved his headquarters back and hosted a picnic with aristocratic officers.

Nonetheless the battle raged on. French efforts were concentrated against the Great Redoubt, which finally fell at around 10am. Captain François recalled: "We hopped over the roundshot as it bounded through the grass. A line of Russian soldiers tried to halt us, but we delivered a volley at 30 paces and walked over them. The gunners tried to beat us back with ramrods and levering spikes. We fought hand-to-hand with them and they were formidable adversaries." Despite this, the Russians retook the Redoubt and few French soldiers survived.

Elsewhere on the Russian right wing, Generals Platov and Uvarov launched a cavalry raid into the French rear across the Kolocha that wreaked havoc but, like elsewhere, they were swept back. Their attack seemed in vain but it did have an unforeseen consequence. The time was between 11am and midday and the French attacks had temporarily stopped. New Russian defence lines were being formed and they had retaken the Redoubt. The Grande Armée could not push the advantage home and there were constant calls for reinforcements, but for Napoleon this meant sending in his elite regiment, the Imperial Guard, who numbered approximately 25,000 men. They had not seen action but Napoleon was reluctant to send in his last reserve. He was on the verge of deploying them but the Russian cavalry appeared and Napoleon called a halt.

The Guard was never used, but had Napoleon deployed them at this critical point, when many of the Russian defences had been breached, the battle might have been decisively won. As it was, the bloodshed dragged on. Even during a temporary 'pause', the cannonade continued and ripped into the static troops. Captain Jean de Marlots recalled appalling sights such as when he was talking to one of his subalterns: "Just as he was telling me that he lacked for nothing, except perhaps a glass of water, a cannonball tore him in two." Not long after that: "I gave my horse to a trooper to hold for half a minute, and the man was promptly killed."

Napoleon watching Moscow burn. In the aftermath of Borodino, the Russians torched their own capital to deny the Grande Armée shelter, supplies and a glorious victory

"JUST AS HE WAS TELLING ME THAT HE LACKED FOR NOTHING, EXCEPT PERHAPS A GLASS OF WATER, A CANNONBALL TORE HIM IN TWO"

Taking the Redoubt

This terrible interval ended just after 2pm when the French began assembling for an assault on the Redoubt. 200 cannon were used to pound the earthworks before an advance by three divisions of infantry and two masses of heavy cavalry flanked on either side. The cavalry overtook the infantry and charged around the Redoubt before pouring in and meeting a mass of muskets and bayonets. As the casualties mounted, they were simply replaced by more soldiers.

Watching the scene from the rear, artilleryman Colonel Griois said: "It would be difficult to convey our feelings as we watched this brilliant feat of arms. Every one of us would have liked to help the cavalry which we saw leaping over ditches and scrambling up ramparts under a hail of canister shots, and a roar of joy resounded on all sides as they became masters of the Redoubt." However, it was a different story inside, as Colonel Meerheimb recalled: "Horsemen and footsoldiers, gripped by a frenzy of slaughter, were butchering each other without any semblance of order."

At 3.30pm, the Grande Armée occupied the Redoubt, but the Russian forces reorganised and formed squares immediately behind it. Their defiance was largely down to Barclay de Tolly who, despite his demotion, remained calm throughout the battle and assembled enough cavalry to launch a counter-charge and bombard the French who now occupied the Redoubt. The Russians had now technically lost the battle but they did not easily give in. The cannon continued to fire for hours and the only progress that the Grande Armée made was when Marshal Poniatowski pushed the Russians back beyond the village of Utitsa. The throes of the battle finally petered out at around 6pm when the Russians withdrew a kilometre away and the guns fell silent.

Remaining carnage

The battlefield that Napoleon belatedly surveyed was a horrendous sight. The ground was littered with the mutilated dead and wounded. Thanks to the continuous artillery fire, severed limbs and exposed entrails everywhere – of men and horses. The worst sight of all was the grisly Redoubt, which, according to one officer, "…exceeded the worst horrors one could ever dream of. The approaches, ditches and earthworks had disappeared under a mound of dead and dying, an average of six to eight men were heaped on top of one other."

There were hardly any prisoners taken, which was unusual in a period when victory was measured by the number of POWs. "The number of dead testified to the courage of the vanquished, rather than to the scale of the victory," the Comte de Ségur later commented. For Napoleon, this was a victory, but at a terrible price, and his army was too exhausted to pursue the Russians. One officer of the Imperial Guard recalled that the men spent the night, "…in the mud, without fires, surrounded by dead and wounded, whose plaintive cries broke one's heart." On the other side the Russians were in high spirits despite having been narrowly defeated. Prince Piotr Viazemsky did not feel beaten and was proud to have stood up to Napoleon: "Everyone was still in such a rapturous state of mind, they were all such recent witnesses of the bravery of our troops, that the thought of failure, or even only partial failure, would not enter our minds."

The cost was enormous. Until the Battle of the Somme in 1916, Borodino was the worst single day's fighting in recorded history. The Russians suffered casualties between 38,000-58,000 men including 29 generals. Entire units virtually ceased to exist, such as the Shirvansk Regiment, which started the battle with 1,300 troops and was reduced to 98 men by 3pm. The Grande Armée had comparatively lighter losses of 28,000, including 11 dead generals, but all of these men could not be easily replaced so far from friendly territory. Napoleon had also virtually destroyed his cavalry, with dire consequences for mobility and logistics. In addition, it has been calculated that the Grande Armée alone had fired 60,000-91,000 artillery rounds and 1.4 million musket shots. This roughly averages out at 100 cannon and 2,300 musket discharges per minute. One modern historian has likened the chaos to, "…a fully loaded 747 crashing, with no survivors, every five minutes for eight hours."

Napoleon had won this battle but his army was irretrievably weakened and he was cut off far from his main supply base. Nonetheless his pride would not yet permit a retreat and his exhausted force continued on their march towards Moscow. Soon the Grande Armée occupied a deserted and deliberately torched capital, and when Napoleon realised that Tsar Alexander would never seek terms, he ignominiously retreated back through the merciless Russian winter and condemned what was left of his army to a frozen oblivion. It is estimated that between June 1812 and February 1813, about 1 million people on all sides died because of the campaign, with only 35,000 Frenchmen returning to France. The pivot of this nightmare was that neither Borodino nor Napoleonic Europe ever truly recovered.

FURTHER READING

- **ADAM ZAMOYSKI,** "1812: NAPOLEON'S FATAL MARCH ON MOSCOW" (HARPER PERENNIAL, 2005)
- **ALEXANDER MIKABERIDZE,** "THE BATTLE OF BORODINO: NAPOLEON AGAINST KUTUZOV" (PEN & SWORD MILITARY, 2010)
- **PETER HAYTHORNTHWAITE,** "BORODINO 1812: NAPOLEON'S GREAT GAMBLE" (OSPREY PUBLISHING, 2012)
- **LAURENCE SPRING,** "1812: RUSSIA'S PATRIOTIC WAR" (THE HISTORY PRESS, 2009)

Images: Alamy

INSIDE ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS

WORDS **GAVIN MORTIMER**

This widely lauded German force was among the few unblemished by brutality – but what was life like serving under the Desert Fox?

On 6 February 1941, General Erwin Rommel found a few minutes to write a letter to his wife. He and Lucie had been married for almost 25 years, and Germany's most dashing general liked to keep her abreast with his news. "Things are moving fast," wrote Rommel, who mentioned he had met Adolf Hitler earlier in the day. "I can only take the barest necessities with me. Perhaps I'll be able to get the rest out soon. I need not tell you how my head is swimming with all the many things that are to be done." The letter ended with a lament from Rommel that his brief leave with his wife had been cut short. "Don't be sad," he wrote. "The new job is very big and important."

Rommel spent the following days in a whirlwind of preparation and planning for his 'new job'. There was no other option. Hitler had appointed him commander of the newly formed Afrika Korps, raised as a direct consequence of Britain's crushing victory over the Italians in North Africa in December 1940.

When Rommel's aircraft touched down at Tripoli on 12 February, he was determined to drive the British out of North Africa. As the first German units began arriving at the city's harbour, he insisted that the 6,000-ton transport ship was unloaded in record time so that he could get his soldiers up to the front with all possible haste. "The men received their tropical kit early next morning," wrote their general. "They radiated complete assurance of victory, and the change of atmosphere did not pass unnoticed in Tripoli."

This propaganda picture was taken in February 1943, just a few months before the surrender of the Afrika Korps

The month after the first elements of the Afrika Korps disembarked at Tripoli, thousands of miles north in Saxony, an 18-year-old conscript was reporting for his first day of 16 weeks of basic infantry training. Rudolf Schneider came from Stauchitz, a village in the flat farmland between Leipzig and Dresden, and had studied agriculture at college before the outbreak of war.

His infantry training complete, Schneider was posted to North Africa in early 1942 to join the Afrika Korps. "When I arrived in Libya, I was interviewed by an officer," recalled Schneider. "They sent me to the Kampfstaffel, General Rommel's personal combat unit of nearly 400 men, which was commanded by Rudolph Kiehl."

Kiehl had served under Rommel in 1939 in the Führer-Begleit-Batallion, Adolf Hitler's bodyguard unit, and the Kampfstaffel served a similar purpose to the Afrika Korps' commander in North Africa. "I was selected for the Kampfstaffel because I knew a lot about British and American vehicles," said Schneider. "As part of my education I had learned how to drive English and American tractors and trucks, and the fact I spoke English was also a factor."

Schneider arrived in Libya at the moment Rommel's supply problems were coming to a head. In March 1942, the Afrika Korps took delivery of 18,000 tons of supplies, 42,000 tons fewer than he estimated his army required for victory in North Africa. He also received a few thousand additional men to augment his three German divisions, but demands for additional formations were refused because Berlin's priority was the Eastern Front.

"DUBBED THE DESERT FOX, HIS RESOURCEFULNESS, FEARLESSNESS AND WILLINGNESS TO SHARE THE SAME HARDSHIPS AS HIS MEN ENDEARED HIM TO THE AFRIKA KORPS"

In the year or so between the Afrika Korps arriving in Libya and Schneider's posting to North Africa, the Desert War had witnessed a series of fierce, bloody battles with neither side able to land a knockout blow. Rommel had enjoyed the most recent success, an offensive in February that saw the Allies pushed back to a defensive position running south from Gazala to Bir Hacheim. The Gazala Line, as it was known, had been occupied a few months earlier by the Afrika Korps. However, a British offensive dislodged them from the Line in November/December 1941.

It was characteristic of the desert war, a fluid conflict that ranged back and forth across Libya, in which armour was crucial. Rommel had shown his genius for armoured warfare as commander of the 7th Panzer Division during the invasion of France in 1940, but in Libya he quickly realised that mass tank battles were futile. Instead, he deployed his 88mm anti-aircraft guns as anti-tank guns, using them to destroy the enemy's armour before sending his panzers forward to wreak havoc on the exposed artillery and infantry.

The boldness of Rommel (who was promoted to field marshal in June 1942) soon became legendary. Dubbed the Desert Fox, his resourcefulness, fearlessness and willingness to share the same hardships as his men, endeared him to the Afrika Korps. He wasn't a commander who inspired love in his men; he was too brusque and abrasive for that. Instead he inspired confidence.

Rudolf Schneider soon learned for himself what sort of man his commander was when he was selected as one of Rommel's drivers. "When I drove him he rarely talked and obviously I was very intimidated by him," reflected Schneider. "I was just a young soldier driving a general. He was not a man for small talk, not with me or anyone. If he asked a question, he wanted an answer, brief and concise. If you talked too long, he would tell you to shut up.

Clockwise from below: – A Bantam jeep in the hands of two Afrika Korps soldiers

– Schneider recalls that while they liked their caps, the they were jealous of the Eighth Army's lightweight uniform

– Rommel, second from right, seen inspecting some of his men in the summer of 1942

– The Kampfstaffel at rest. Neither the SAS nor the LRDG ever used tents when on operations in the desert

MACHINES OF THE KORPS

VEHICLES WERE CRUCIAL IN THE DESERT WAR AND THOUGH THE PANZERS WERE A POTENT WEAPON, THE AFRIKA KORPS OFTEN HAD TO IMPROVISE BECAUSE OF SUPPLY PROBLEMS

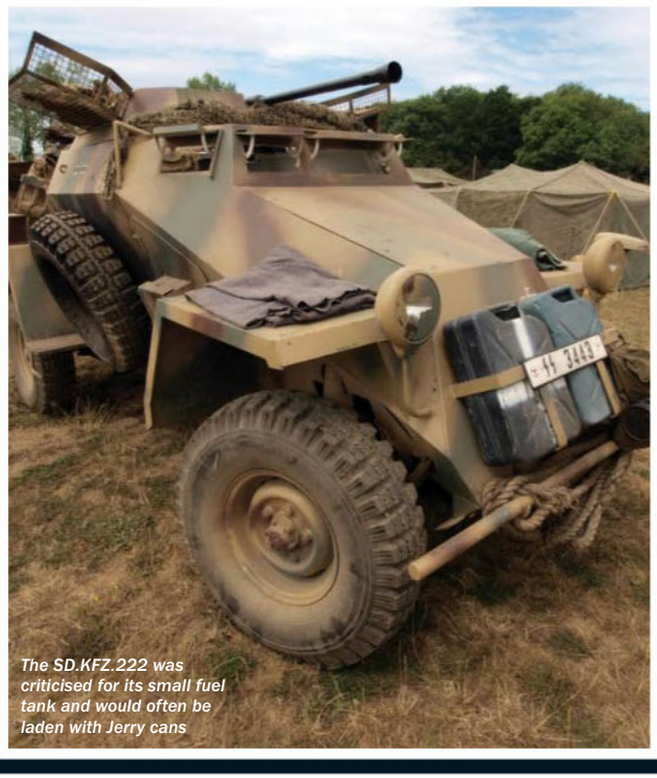
A Panzer III F model, advances across the Western Desert during the Gazala campaign, June 1942

PANZER MK III

For much of the war in North Africa, the Afrika Korps used the Panzer Mark II and III tanks, with the more advanced Tiger Tank not arriving until late 1942. Manufactured by Daimler-Benz, the model from the late 1930s onwards, the Mark III, had a 50mm cannon and two 7.92mm machine guns, as well as thicker armour than its rivals. These features gave the panzers superiority over Allied tanks until the arrival of the Sherman in autumn 1942. Another innovative feature of the Mk III – which had a crew of five – was a three-seat turret complete with intercom system.

SD.KFZ.222 RECONNAISSANCE CAR

The Sd.Kfz.222 was an armoured reconnaissance car that was effective because of its armament – a 20mm cannon and machine gun in its open turret – and performance. With its rear-mounted 90 horsepower liquid-cooled engine, the vehicle was capable of reaching 43 miles per hour on roads. It also was also know for its durability.



The SD.KFZ.222 was criticised for its small fuel tank and would often be laden with Jerry cans

"THE SAS BEGAN USING JEEPS IN THE DESERT IN 1942 AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS WAS EVIDENT TO THE AFRIKA KORPS, WHO AVIDLY USED ANY OF THE AMERICAN-MADE VEHICLES THEY CAPTURED"

WILLYS BANTAMS JEEP

The SAS began using Jeeps in the desert in 1942 and their effectiveness was evident to the Afrika Korps, who avidly used any of the American-made vehicles they captured. Fitted with heavy machine gun mountings, the Jeeps had a payload of 600 pounds and a maximum range of approximately 250 miles on a single tank of fuel.

Rudolf Schneider is seen here digging out his Willys jeep

Two members of the Kampfstaffel on a captured LRDG radio truck. The soldier on the left is trying out the Vickers K

"I wouldn't say he was arrogant but he believed in himself too much as a commander. He didn't ask the opinion of his other officers, he had great confidence in his own decisions… and some German officers didn't like Rommel."

Schneider also remembered his commander as, "…a very straight and correct officer... he didn't fear anything and we, the soldiers, respected him."

Rommel's rectitude was one reason why the North African campaign is remembered as the only 'clean' theatre of the war, insomuch as any war can be 'clean'. The other reason was the absence of SS units or the Gestapo. "I never saw any Nazis the whole time I served in the Afrika Korps," recalled Schneider. "In the Kampfstaffel, our conduct had to be exemplary. One time, I think in Bouerat (a town in western Libya), a German solder, not from my unit, raped a local woman. Rommel had him shot and the firing squad came from my unit – 12 men but only six of the rifles had live rounds."

Schneider glimpsed Rommel's 'correctness' at first hand, not long after joining the Kampfstaffel. Having driven Rommel to inspect some tank positions, Schneider alerted his commander to the approach of a vehicle. As it neared, they saw through the dust it was a British ambulance. "I was on my rounds and accidentally ran my ambulance into a German tank position," remembered Alex Franks of the 7th Armoured Company. "I was terrified."

Schneider estimated there were about 20 members of the Kampfstaffel, as well as Rommel, speaking English. They ordered Franks out of the vehicle. "He came out with 20 rifles pointed at him and Rommel said 'Stand to attention, you are in front of a German general'," recalled Schneider. "Rommel then asked him where he came from. Alex told him he was an ambulance driver who had lost his way. Rommel asked if he had a compass and Alex said that he didn't." The ambulance was searched for weapons but there were none, and Rommel then asked Franks his destination. It was a hospital but Franks was way off the beaten track. "Rommel pointed him in the right direction and off he went," recalled Schneider. Franks survived the war and met Schneider in 2009.

Rommel had been inspecting his tank positions as part of preparations for a major offensive against the British positions along the Gazala Line. The aim of this was to capture Tobruk, the Libyan port that had remained stubbornly in Allied hands throughout the fluctuations of the desert war.

The offensive began on 26 May 1942, with the Italian infantry launching a frontal assault on the British and South African troops holding the Gazala Line. Rommel had held a poor opinion of his Latin allies since arriving in Libya in February 1941. Within a few weeks, his adjutant, Major Schraepler, was writing to Rommel's wife about the deficiencies of the Italians: "They either do not come forward at all, or if they do, they run at the first shot," he explained. "If an Englishman so much as comes in sight, their hands go up."

Schneider didn't share this view of Germany's ally. "The Italian soldier was a very good soldier but very badly treated," he said. "The Italian

LIFE IN THE KAMPFSTAFFEL

THE KAMPFSTAFFEL WAS ROMMEL'S ELITE 400-STRONG COMBAT FORCE, RUDOLF SCHNEIDER IS THE LAST SURVIVOR OF THE UNIT WHOSE JOB WAS TO PROTECT THE DESERT FOX

Born in April 1923 in rural eastern Germany, Rudolf Schneider enrolled at the German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture in Witzenhausen in the 1930s. His dream was to farm in south west Africa (present day Namibia), but in 1941, shortly after his 18th birthday, Schneider was drafted into the army. He underwent basic training in Dresden before being shipped to North Africa in early 1942 to join the newly formed Afrika Korps. Once in Libya, his knowledge of British and American vehicles – gained at agricultural college – proved so valuable that he was selected to join the Kampfstaffel, Rommel's reconnaissance/bodyguard force of nearly 400 soldiers. "I was one of Rommel's drivers," said Schneider. "I was chosen because I knew English and could operate their equipment. I also had a good memory for landscapes, which was important in the desert. We would drive long distances and all you would see was stones and sand, stones and sand."

Schneider was captured in May 1943 and sent to the USA, where he spent the rest of the war as a prisoner in Camp Swift, Texas. He spent many of his days as a prisoner picking cotton for five cents an hour. After the war, Schneider returned to Europe, but the British, discovering he had been a member of Rommel's Kampfstaffel, detained him when his ship arrived in Liverpool. He spent three years working as a farm labourer in Staffordshire. He finally returned to then East Germany in 1948, and married his childhood sweetheart, who had waited for him.

Schneider, right, and a comrade grab themselves some fresh gazelle meat in Tunis, early 1943

"ONCE IN LIBYA, HIS KNOWLEDGE OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN VEHICLES PROVED SO VALUABLE THAT HE WAS SELECTED TO JOIN THE KAMPFSTAFFEL"

“IT HAD BEEN AGREED IN EARLY 1941 THAT THE ITALIANS WOULD SUPPLY THE AFRIKA KORPS WITH RATIONS, WHICH THEY DID, BUT WHAT THEY PROVIDED WAS BARELY FIT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION”

officers had special food and the soldiers had poorer food. The Italian officers had brothels but not the soldiers. The officers in general had a better standard of living. In the Afrika Korps, officers and men had the same food and shared the same conditions.”

One source of simmering discontent between the Germans and the Italians concerned rations. Schneider recalled that, “Italian officers didn’t like Rommel because... there wasn’t much trust.” The antipathy was reciprocated by the German commander and his men, all of who blamed the Italian high command for the poor quality of their rations. It had been agreed in early 1941 that the Italians would supply the Afrika Korps with rations, which they did, but what they provided was barely fit for human consumption. “This was one of the reasons we didn’t believe in the Italians, they didn’t keep their word [about rations],” explains Schneider. “They had a lot of fresh oranges, and we didn’t get any.”

Instead, the Afrika Korps received tins of preserved meat, on which were stamped the initials AM. They stood for ‘Administrazione Militare’ but the Italian soldiers and their German counterparts preferred ‘Asinus Musssolini’ (Mussolini’s arse). Another source of complaint for the Germans was the hard black bread.

Yet despite their resentment with the rations, the Afrika Korps ate what they received with characteristic stoicism. It was one of the features of the Korps, a discipline and camaraderie nurtured in the German army’s training, underpinned by the classlessness of national socialism.

Schneider confirmed the view. “In the Kampfstaffel, the men came from everywhere: Saxony, Bavaria, Prussia or, in Rommel’s case, Swabia, in south west Germany. No one region dominated and there were no factions. We all got on.”

German military training also placed an emphasis on always making ground as a team, a mobility that was interdependent and interchangeable across the army so that an infantryman, tankman, artilleryman and engineer all had an implicit trust in one another’s role. This instilled in the German soldier a confidence and adaptability that was absent from their British counterparts.

Broad as the parameters of the Afrika Korps’s training were, they didn’t allow officers to go outside of this framework, unlike the British, who possessed a type of officer more innovative and imaginative than most on the German side. Two such men were David Stirling, founder of the Special Air Service (SAS), and Ralph Bagnold, who in June 1940, raised the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG).

There were sound military reasons why Rommel never formed a special forces unit to rival that of the SAS and LRDG, notably the constant fuel constraints and the fact that the British military installations were less remote and better guarded. Ultimately, however, it

***Above:** An M40 steel helmet of the Afrika Korps. These were fitted with ventilation holes to help with the baking heat*

Another German propaganda image shows a heavily armed Afrika Korps patrol. Note the scorpion symbol on the bonnet

With dust and sandstorms a regular occurrence, some soldiers went to extreme lengths to protect their faces

was because the German military mind was predicated on organisation and not innovation. “It is true that we didn’t have the initiative of the British,” said Schneider. “We were trained to fight and think as a team not as individuals.”

Additionally, the Afrika Korps was more wary of the desert than the LRDG. Ralph Bagnold was an eminent desert explorer in the 1920s, as were several other LRDG officers. They had accumulated a knowledge and respect for the environment that gave them a confidence – although crucially not an over-confidence – to penetrate into the heart of the desert, while the Afrika Korps preferred to keep close to the coastal regions. “We knew the LRDG were situated around Siwa (oasis) but we were told to keep our distance,” remembered Schneider. “We didn’t like to go too far into the desert, because if we were wounded, there would be no-one who would come and help us. Occasionally we saw LRDG patrols, but we had instructions not to go after them.”

Nonetheless, when the Axis forces launched their offensive on 26 May 1942, Rommel led his Afrika Korps south into the desert, while the Italians attacked the Gazala Line. In effect, the German commander was throwing a right hook at the Allies, sweeping round the French garrison in Bir Hacheim and attacking the British behind the Gazala line. “We drove south of Bir Hacheim and then came at the Gazala Line from the east,” recalled Schneider. “He (Rommel) said we would break the Line from the rear. During the day we laid up, hiding our vehicles because the RAF controlled the skies, and so we drove only at night... Rommel led us. He did the navigating. We didn’t know where we were going. He just ordered us to follow him.”

For three days the Axis and Allied armour fought, while the First Free French Brigade held out at Bir Hacheim. Rommel recalled on 28 May that, “…British tanks opened fire on my command post, which was located close beside the Kampfstaffel and our vehicles. Shells fell all around us and the windscreen of our command omnibus flew into fragments.”

Schneider’s hand and stomach were peppered with shrapnel: flesh wounds mostly, not enough to take him out of the battle. But the intensity of the British resistance caused Rommel to order his Afrika Korps to pull back and form a defensive position called ‘The Cauldron’. The British drove on, confident that a victory was within their grasp, but the Afrika Korps, despite losing some 200 tanks in four days of fighting, countered with the German 88mm anti-tank guns, inflicting a heavy toll on the British armour. On 10 June, Bir Hacheim fell and three days later the British armour was defeated on ‘Black Saturday’.

The Eighth Army retreated from the Gazala Line, withdrawing all the way to El Alamein in what became known as the ‘Gazala Gallop’. On 21 June, Tobruk finally fell to the Germans, along with about 35,000 British and Commonwealth troops. Schneider remembered the fall of Tobruk as a “wonderful” moment – not because of the victory but because of the British rations. “We had lived for months on this heavy black bread and these awful Italian rations. Suddenly we found fresh fruit and vegetables, even strawberry jam.”

Life in North Africa was unquestionably tougher for the Afrika Korps than for their enemies. The Allies were well supplied and were also able to rest and recuperate in sophisticated cities with delights on offer that the German forces could only dream of. “Unlike the British, who had Alexandria and Cairo, which were full of restaurants and bars and other things, we had no cities like that,” reflected Schneider. “So the opportunity to escape from the war for a few days wasn’t possible.” Even in the few towns that were in their hands, such as Benghazi and El Agheila, “…it was forbidden, on the orders of Rommel, to enter a restaurant where Italian soldiers were, and we would be punished if we disobeyed him.”

There were other spoils of war to be had in Tobruk, aside from strawberry jam. “We captured field guns and tanks – Matildas and also some Stuarts – and some command vehicles,” said Schneider. “We started to use those but we preferred to use our own small arms, the 98k carbine and MP40 (Schmeisser), which were good weapons.” By the summer of 1942, 85 per cent of the Afrika Korps’s transport consisted of vehicles manufactured in Britain and America.

***Above:** An infantryman stands beside a knocked out M3 Lee in Tunisia, December 1942*

In his memoir of the Desert War, *Alamein*, Major Paolo Caccia-Dominioni, an Italian engineer, wrote that: “Captain Kiel [sic], the commander of Rommel’s Kampfstaffel, invented a new sport for the entertainment of his men: tall and fair as they were, dressed in British khaki, bare-headed in accordance with the fashion current in both armies, driving captured vehicles that still bore their original markings. They would infiltrate among the enemy rearguard, tag along quietly for a while – and then suddenly reveal their true identity with the merry rattle of machine-gun fire! Any number of prisoners had been rounded up in this way.”

While Schneider agreed that they did indeed use the captured Allied vehicles, he dismissed the idea they wore the enemy’s uniform. “It was strictly forbidden to put on any part of the British uniform,” he said. “But we actually liked the British uniform in the desert because it was light. Our uniform was cotton but it was heavier

“DURING THE DAY WE LAID UP, HIDING OUR VEHICLES BECAUSE THE RAF CONTROLLED THE SKIES, AND SO WE DROVE ONLY AT NIGHT... ROMMEL LED US”

Panzer IIIs of the Afrika Korps charge through the desert of Libya

Roger-Viollet/REX/Shutterstock

The Afrika Korps never raised a unit similar to that of the SAS, some of whom are seen here in Egypt in early 1942

than what the British had to wear, although we liked our caps."

On 23 June, Rommel's men crossed the Libyan border on the heels of the retreating Eighth Army. Six days later, the Kampfstaffel and the 90 Light Division entered Mersa Matruh. The Allies' last coastal fortress was now in German hands but it was the last decisive success of Rommel's campaign. On 3 July, he wrote to his wife that, "…resistance is too great and our strength exhausted."

The Afrika Korps had sent the Allies fleeing back into Egypt but they had reached the end of their supply line, and of their endurance. "After we took Tobruk, we got the order as Rommel's personal combat unit to cross the Libyan border and attack Mersa Matruh," reflected Schneider. "It was one of the greatest mistakes of Rommel, to push towards El Alamein. He should have gone back to the Egypt border once again."

A little under four months later, General Montgomery launched his offensive at El Alamein, the battle that would ultimately win the war in the desert for the Allies. "We knew that the British were preparing to attack El Alamein but we didn't know the power they had," said Schneider. "On 23 October, they started the attack. We were in the south of the Alamein line, only lightly defended because Rommel thought Montgomery would attack the north of the line.

"THE BRITISH SOLDIERS LOOKED AT US AND SAID 'YOU LIVE LIKE DOGS'. THEY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND, SEEING THE STATE WE WERE IN, WHY WE CONTINUED TO FIGHT"

When the British attacked we fought them off, but then received orders to withdraw slowly through an anti-tank defensive position about 50 km west of El Alamein… we didn't believe it when we were ordered to withdraw."

Kampfstaffel Kiehl fought with great gallantry in the initial assault on the Alamein Line, using the American Honey tanks they had captured at Gazala to push back the Free French. Further north, the fighting was just as ferocious but, gradually and inexorably, the Allies began to advance west.

Schneider and the rest of the Afrika Korps began a withdrawal that while disciplined and orderly, continued for the next six months as the Allies pushed across Libya and into Tunisia.

"My last fight with the British was at Sidi Ali el Hattab, just west of Tunis," said Schneider. "We captured six British soldiers and we wondered what to do with them. Our commanders told us it was forbidden to shoot them, so we shared our rations with them, but at this point we had hardly any left. Just stale black bread. No toilet paper or coffee, and we were making tea by boiling water and adding some leaves from trees. The British soldiers looked at us and said, 'you live like dogs'. They didn't understand, seeing the state we were in, why we continued to fight."

Schneider was eventually captured by American troops near to Kelibia on 16 May 1943. "On the one hand, I was happy to have survived when so many of my comrades had died," he reflected. "But we were prisoners and we all wondered what would now happen to us."

Schneider was shipped to the USA where he spent the rest of the war. When he finally returned to what was, by then, East Germany, he learned that of the 389 soldiers in the Kampfstaffel, "…only 39 came back." He was one of the lucky ones, perhaps the luckiest of all, because waiting for him when he returned to Saxony was his girlfriend, Alfreda, whose photograph he had kept with him throughout seven years of separation. "I didn't talk to Rommel much, but one of few times he spoke to me was to ask if I had a girlfriend," said Schneider. "I said 'I do, Herr General', and he replied 'I hope only one'."

Images: Alamy, Getty, Rex Features

AFTER HASTINGS

ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND'S RESISTANCE WAR

WORDS **EDOARDO ALBERT**

Even though William defeated Harold Godwinson in battle on 14 October 1066, the king's death did not bring England under his control

Harold lay dead, his face so hacked that it was all but impossible to identify his body. Nearby lay his brothers, Gyrth and Leofwine. William, duke of Normandy, had laid waste the family that had dominated England through the last years of the childless King Edward the Confessor.

As the morning of 15 October 1066 dawned on the devastation around Senlac Hill, William knew that his all-or-nothing gamble, to bring Harold to battle and kill him, had paid off.

The duke – for he was still not king – withdrew to Hastings and, in the words of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, "…waited there to know whether the people would submit to him." But they didn't.

Yes, William had killed Harold, but killing a king didn't automatically make you king in his place; Anglo-Saxon rules of royal succession required the support of the Witenagemot, the assembly of a kingdom's leading men. While William had killed plenty of England's leading men at the Battle of Hastings, there were more than enough still alive to hail a different man as king.

Which they did. In London, which was teeming with armed men – both those who had escaped after the battle and others who had not made it to Hastings in time to take part – the earls Eadwine and Morcar, and the archbishops of Canterbury and York, declared the great-nephew of Edward the Confessor king. Edgar the Ætheling was about 15 and the last surviving male descendant of Alfred the Great. Of all the claimants to England's throne, he had by far the most convincing case. But Harold, the most powerful man in the country, had muscled the young Edgar out of the way when the Confessor died, making him the first earl of Oxford as a sop.

However, William, convinced of the right of his cause, was not going to wait forever for the English to come and give him the crown. "When he found that they would not come to him,"

A fierce battle rages between the Normans and last pockets of Anglo-Saxon resistance, c 1071

Image: Chris Collingwood www.collingwoodhistoricart.com

"AS THE MORNING OF 15 OCTOBER 1066 DAWNED ON THE DEVASTATION AROUND SENLAC HILL, WILLIAM KNEW THAT HIS ALL-OR-NOTHING GAMBLE, TO BRING HAROLD TO BATTLE AND KILL HIM, HAD PAID OFF"

William went to them, in blood and fury. The first stop was Romney. This was unfortunate for the town as some of the Norman army had landed there by mistake and been killed. Leaving what remained of it behind, William continued east to Dover. There was no castle there – although there soon would be – but the natural geography of the site provided defenders with great advantages. However, William's implacable advance terrified the defenders into surrender, and soon after, the town burned. Having seen the strategic nature of the site for himself, William may have built the first version of Dover Castle during his stay.

If he had not known it before, by now William knew that he had to take London to unlock the country. So, leaving a garrison in Dover to secure his rear, he advanced on the capital. The terrified inhabitants of the towns on the way came out to offer their submission. Their fear was realistic: the Normans were living off the land, which meant plundering the villages and towns on their way.

London, though, was different. Safe on the far bank of the Thames, its defenders even had the courage to sortie across London Bridge – one of the many early incarnations before the most enduring version was built in stone at the end of the 12th century. Although the sortie was unsuccessful, the Normans could not take the bridge or cross the river. Safe across the water and behind the city's walls, the young Edgar still ruled as king of England, now a month after the battle. William had received the submission of only those parts of the country he had directly terrorised.

***Right:** A silver coin depicting William the Conqueror. Putting his likeness on coinage would help extent his influence over Britain*

Faced with this refusal to acknowledge him, William set out on a path of terror. With an amphibious assault out of the question, the Normans switched from foraging to full-on destruction. They swung west, across Hampshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire before coming to Wallingford, where the Thames could be safely forded. William's army now approached the capital from the north west, burning through Middlesex and Hertfordshire on his way. He had learned these tactics in the long and bitter struggle for control of his own duchy, and now turned his battle-hardened army loose on a new country.

In London, the 15-year-old king was unable to galvanise resistance. Perhaps if Eadwine and Morcar, earls of Mercia and Northumbria, had supported him wholeheartedly, Edgar might have inspired the people to endure the oncoming siege. But, as news of William's advance reached London, support dropped away from the young king. Eadwine and Morcar withdrew, taking their men with them. With the men who had acclaimed him king deserting, Edgar must have felt he had little hope, and as news of William's advance reached the city, panic and hopelessness spread.

In the end, Edgar had no choice. As the year drew down into darkness, the young king rode out of London with a retinue of bishops and magnates and, presenting himself to William at Berkhamstead, laid the throne of England before the duke.

While that might have been enough for the English, for the Normans, William was not king until he was crowned. So, on Christmas Day 1066, William entered the great abbey church, to be anointed and crowned king – leaving men-at-arms outside to keep guard. At least, they were supposed to be on guard. When the archbishop asked the congregation in Westminster Abbey to acclaim William as king, the guards supposedly thought the great shout from within meant their leader was being attacked, so they set fire to the houses nearby. Pretty useless guards then: king betrayed and they stay outside.

No, the guards must have thought they could take advantage of the coronation to continue what they had been doing for the last month: pillaging. The *Chronicle* reads: "The flames quickly spreading, the people in the church were seized with panic in the midst of their rejoicings, and crowds of men and women, of all ranks

"WILLIAM WAS CROWNED KING IN AN ALL-BUT-EMPTY CHURCH WHILE OUTSIDE THE FLAMES RAGED AND PEOPLE FOUGHT"

HEREWARD THE WAKE

ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS MEN WHO RESISTED THE CONQUEST IS ALSO, SADLY, THE WORST ATTESTED HISTORICALLY

Hereward's later fame relies upon stories written a considerable time after the events, with much mingling of legend with the history. What we can say is that Hereward, along with his followers, sacked Peterborough Abbey, ostensibly to save its valuables from the Normans. In 1071, Hereward joined the final spasm of English resistance, led by Morcar. The Earl of Northumbria had taken no part in the rebellions of the previous year but now, with his power greatly reduced, he attempted to make a stand on the Isle of Ely, amid the bogs of Fenland. The accounts vary, but William somehow brought the siege to an end, capturing Morcar and imprisoning him for the rest of his life. Hereward himself escaped the fall of Ely, disappearing into legend.

***Below:** Hereward's epithet, first recorded in the late-14th century, might mean 'the watchful'*

The War Against William

THE GUERRILLA WAR AGAINST THE CONQUEST LASTED FOR FIVE YEARS AND LEFT MUCH OF THE COUNTRY, PARTICULARLY IN THE NORTH, DEVASTATED. THIS IS WHERE IT HAPPENED

1 Gytha, mother of Harold Godwinson, leads Exeter in rebellion, while waiting for Harold's sons to arrive with mercenaries from Ireland. William besieges the city and, after a bitter fight, it surrenders, but not before Gytha makes her escape.

2 The first major rebellion takes place with Edgar the Ætheling as its figurehead with support from the Earls of Mercia and Northumbria. William's army devastates the region. The rebellion is rapidly crushed but its leaders escape.

3 Robert Cumin, appointed earl of Northumbria by William, is killed, along with hundreds of his men in Durham. The north revolts and takes York, but William, arriving at speed, puts the rebels to flight. They take refuge in the marshlands to the east.

4 Further rebellions break out. William harries the land and defeats the rebels outside Stafford.

5 The Harrying of the North. Having bought off the Danes, William sets his army to devastate the entire region.

6 The final spasm of Anglo-Saxon resistance, led by Hereward the Wake, gradually sputters into nothing.

Even after their victory at Hastings, the Normans still had to fight to tighten their grip on the British isles

and conditions, eagerly struggled to make their escape from the church." William was crowned king in an all-but-empty church while outside the flames raged and people fought. It was to be an all too apt start to his reign.

Now king, William set about distributing the spoils. The land of those who died at Hastings, William regarded as forfeit to him. As Harold and his brothers had owned huge amounts of the country, there was plenty to go around. The two earls, Eadwine and Morcar, who had supported Edgar, appeared before William to swear him fealty.

The country seemed secure. Leaving his chief lieutenants as regents, William returned to Normandy six months after he had arrived, taking Edgar the Ætheling, Stigand, the archbishop of Canterbury, and earls Eadwine and Morcar with him. Although the king was stepping back into his dukedom, he was taking hostages against his fortune.

Back in England, William's regents were taking precautions of a kind entirely new to the English: castles. Although Alfred had established burhs, fortified towns, as part of his defence plan against the Vikings, castles as strong points to defend and dominate the surrounding country were unknown. The magnates William had left in charge set to with a will, pressing the populace to erect the buildings of their domination, while looking the other way as their men continued to plunder and pillage. It was not the recipe for peace.

The first to shake off the torpor of defeat was the aptly named Eadric the Wild, who ravaged Herefordshire in the summer of 1067, defeating Norman patrols but, despite besieging it, he was unable to take Hereford Castle. With the English earls taken hostage, it was up to the lower levels of English society to act. Next up, the men of Kent. With the brand new Dover Castle rising from its headland, they had an obvious target, but not the means to take it. However, there were others regarding this land with envious eyes: Eustace, count of Boulogne. Not an obvious choice of ally, given that he'd fought alongside William at Hastings, but the count had fallen out with the duke over the division of the spoils. Landing at Dover, he laid siege to the castle, but the Norman defenders held out, in fact, they did more than hold out: they sallied forth before more English rebels could assemble and put Eustace's men to flight. The count himself made it back to his boats but many of his men did not.

Northumbria – that is, the old kingdom, the land north of the Humber – would provide the greatest resistance and suffer the worst retribution in the struggle against the Normans. The first inkling was when the (English) lord given charge of the lands north of the Tyne by William, a thegn called Copsig, was killed by the man whose land it had been previously, Oswulf. Oswulf beheaded Copsig himself. However, before he could become a focus for resistance, he was killed by a robber.

These though, were small-scale affairs. It would take something more serious to bring William scurrying back over the Channel: like a conspiracy by the surviving Godwinsons, led by Harold's mother, Gytha. Making her base in the walled city of Exeter, Gytha sent messages to other English towns to rise up against the conqueror, while other feelers were sent to her contacts at the Danish court and Harold's sons by his first wife, Edith Swan-Neck, attempted to raise an army in Ireland.

From London, where he had spent Christmas of 1067, William marched southwest, summoning his new English subjects to fight alongside him. But, approaching Exeter, it seemed the rebellion had again fizzled out: the leading citizens of the city came to meet the conqueror and swear obedience, giving him hostages as a mark of their good faith.

But going back to the city, they closed the gates of Exeter against William. Maybe they were playing for time, hoping to delay the king so that reinforcements could arrive from elsewhere. To persuade them to open the gates, William had one of the hostages blinded in view of the men manning the city's ramparts; according to a chronicler, one defender gave answer by dropping his trousers and farting. The ensuing siege was bitterly fought, but after 18 days, the city asked for terms.

The English chroniclers state that Exeter surrendered because Gytha, along with her followers, escaped from the besieged town, leaving the citizens hoping on William's mercy. Perhaps surprisingly, William gave it, although somewhat less surprisingly, his men were not quite so merciful. Still, the city was not razed.

With the rising quelled, William brought his wife, Matilda, over from Normandy and, on Whitsun, she was crowned queen at Westminster. Both English and Norman lords were in attendance at the coronation. It seemed that William was on his way to establishing the sort of hybrid aristocracy that, a generation before, Cnut had made following his conquest of England.

***Above:** Much of the Old English nobility attended the coronation of William the Conqueror at Westminster*

Resentment, in particular over land appropriations, was growing. Earls Eadwine and Morcar, seeing their lands whittled away, rebelled and, with such support, others rallied to their cause. Most notably Edgar the Ætheling, who had evidently returned to England with William, had been able to make a getaway from his status as enforced royal houseguest, joined the earls. "Then it was told the king, that the people in the north had gathered themselves together, and would stand against him if he came," the *Chronicle* reads.

William did indeed arrive, in the manner accustomed. Faced with open rebellion, led by the two most powerful English earls and with Edgar as its figurehead, William unleashed his army. The *Chronicle* records that William marched from Nottingham, to York, to Lincoln, and throughout the region. The speed with which the rebellion folded gives some indication of the devastation the Norman war machine left in its wake. But most devastating of all, for English morale at least, were the castles. William planted them in the wake of his army and the English had no answer. One chronicler explained: "In the English districts there were very few fortresses… so that, though the English were warlike and brave, they were little able to make a determined resistance."

With the rebellion failing, earls Eadwine and Morcar again submitted to William while Edgar fled north, seeking sanctuary from King Malcolm of Scotland. A notable, and surprising, feature of William's character is the mercy he showed his foes once they submitted to him – even after repeated acts of rebellion.

***Below:** With almost no contemporary images in existence, we must rely on later depictions of William I*

"WILLIAM HAD ONE OF THE HOSTAGES BLINDED IN VIEW OF THE MEN MANNING THE CITY'S RAMPARTS; ACCORDING TO A CHRONICLER, ONE DEFENDER GAVE ANSWER BY DROPPING HIS TROUSERS AND FARTING"

Hereward's deeds captivated the Victorians, who saw him as an English national hero

The end of the Anglo-Saxons?

UNDER WILLIAM'S RULE, OLD ENGLISH CUSTOMS WERE ALMOST ENTIRELY LOST IN FAVOUR OF NORMAN ONES

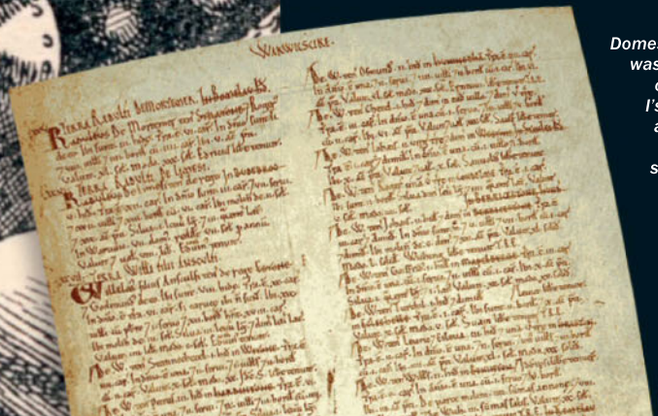
The *Domesday Book*, William's inventory of the country, shows that by 1086, Englishmen owned only five per cent of the country, and this proportion reduced further in the following decades. William of Malmesbury, writing in the early 12th century, said: "England has become the dwelling place of foreigners and a playground for lords of alien blood. No Englishman today is an earl, a bishop or an abbot."

Those who had survived the invasion, and the subsequent rebellions, went abroad, seeking out sanctuary in Scotland, Scandinavia, Ireland and further afield, sometimes much further afield to places like Byzantium. Emigrating Englishmen found employment with the emperor's elite Varangian Guard, so much so that what was previously a Scandinavian unit became known as a largely Anglo-Saxon one.

They left behind a land where the language of the elite had changed too: Latin and French were spoken in William's court and this continued through the reign of his son and heir, William Rufus. However, when Rufus was killed by a misshot arrow while hunting in his father's New Forest (William had lost his second son, Richard, to another hunting accident in the forest some 30 years earlier), his younger brother, Henry I, began a revival in English and English customs that might have led to early reconciliation if it was not for his lack of a male heir. Henry designated his daughter, Matilda, as ruler but Stephen, William's grandson, wanted the crown for himself. The ensuing 20-year civil war caused such destruction that it was called the Anarchy and, the *Chronicle* lamented: "Christ and his saints slept."

At the more local level, contact between the 8,000 or so Norman settlers and the native English slowly improved. Intermarriage had become common by the early 12th century. While there were no English abbots, Englishmen served as priors in monasteries and monks worked, particularly through written histories, to improve relations between the two peoples. When the Anarchy ended and Henry II ascended the throne at the end of 1154, things had changed. A century after Hastings, English had become the national language again, although the Old English names were largely lost. The English were now a race of Bobs and Johns, rather than Æthelwins and Æthelwalds.

By 1170, Richard fitz Nigel could write: "In the present day, the races have become so fused that it can scarcely be discerned who is English and who is Norman." The conquerors had, in the end, been conquered.



***Left:** The Domesday Book was complied on William I's orders to assess the financial situation of the land*

But with William busy in the north, Harold's sons, who had been busy raising men in Ireland, saw a chance to act. They landed in Somerset and attempted to take Bristol, but failed in the face of determined local opposition. They continued raiding until Eadnoth, a local thegn and, by his name an English one too, met them in battle. Eadnoth was killed, but Harold's boys suffered great losses too. They withdrew back to Ireland, raiding as they went. If they hoped to raise their countrymen, they had failed. Indeed, their tactics suggested they were more concerned with paying off the men they had hired than raising the country against William.

The greatest threat to William's rule was still to come. Concerned about his lack of control in the north, William gave the rule of the lands north of the Tyne to a man named Robert Cumin. Seeking to ingratiate himself in the Norman manner, Robert ravaged his way north, stopping in Durham and lodging with the bishop. At dawn on 31 January 1069, the desperate Northumbrians broke into the city and slaughtered the Flemings. Robert made a stand against the attackers in the bishop's house, but the rebels set it aflame, cutting down all of those who tried to escape.

As news of Robert's death spread, revolts broke out throughout the land. The governor of York castle, caught outside its walls, was killed, although the castle held out against the rebels. "But King William came from the South, unawares on them, with a large army, and put them to flight, and slew on the spot those who could not escape; which were many hundred men; and plundered the town."

However, many escaped, disappearing into the marshes and meres that surrounded low-lying York. When William went back south, the castles in York were attacked again. Meanwhile, the sons of Harold tried once more, landing near Barnstaple in mid-summer with 60-odd shiploads of men. Although they were defeated, it was at a high cost, and it all added to the sense of crisis gripping the country.

"WILLIAM SENT HIS MEN INTO THE COUNTRY AROUND YORK WITH ORDERS TO LAY EVERYTHING TO WASTE. THIS IS WHY TO THIS DAY, THROUGHOUT YORKSHIRE, WILLIAM IS CALLED THE BASTARD"

Worse was to follow. News of the repeated English uprisings had crossed the North Sea and reached the ears of King Sweyn Estridsson of Denmark, nephew of Cnut. Following his uncle's example, Sweyn raised a fleet and, late in the summer of 1069, sent it over the whale road to England, where it was met in the Humber estuary by Edgar and the northern English lords. Although Sweyn had not come himself – giving command of his fleet to his brother, Asbjorn – it must have seemed to the rebels that Norman rule would soon be brought to an end; and even more so when the panicking garrison of York sallied out to meet the Anglo-Danish army and was destroyed.

But when William came north, he found the Danes employing old Viking tactics: they had gone. Instead, they made camp on the Isle of Axholme, amid the impenetrable bogs and marshes of Lincolnshire. But as William attempted to engage with this army, news came to him of attacks all over the country: at Montacute, Exeter and Shrewsbury. William sent lieutenants to try to deal with the rebellions but the rebels withdrew into wildernesses at the Norman approach, only to re-emerge once they had gone. It took William himself to bring some of them to battle at Stafford, where he defeated them.

On his return north, William found the Danes had again departed. It was like fighting fog, so William chose another strategy: gold. He bought Asbjorn off and gave him leave to raid the coast so long as he went home at the end of winter.

With the Danes out of the way, William turned his cold gaze on the lands around York. While he had bought off Asbjorn for now, William knew that paying the Dane meant that he would return. But William was determined that, when he did, Asbjorn would find no one and nothing waiting for him.

Thus began the Harrying of the North. William sent his men into the country around York with orders to lay everything to waste. This is why to this day, throughout Yorkshire, William is called the Bastard. According to one chronicler, more than 100,000 people died of starvation. The survivors resorted to eating the dead, or selling themselves into slavery. The monks of Evesham Abbey in Worcestershire remembered with horror how starving refugees would stagger into the abbey but, given food, died from eating it, their emaciated bodies unable to cope.

With the north decimated, William spent the first few months of 1070 finishing off the rebels in Mercia. By March, it was all over. The last serious resistance had been crushed. William had, finally, conquered.

FURTHER READING

- **WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR: THE NORMAN IMPACT UPON ENGLAND** BY DAVID C DOUGLAS (1999) YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS (NEW HAVEN)
- **THE NORMAN CONQUEST** BY MARC MORRIS (2012) HUTCHINSON (LONDON)
- **THE ENGLISH RESISTANCE: THE UNDERGROUND WAR AGAINST THE NORMANS** BY PETER REX (2014) AMBERLEY PUBLISHING (STROUD)
- **NORMAN CONQUEST OF THE NORTH: THE REGION AND ITS TRANSFORMATION 1000-1135** BY WILLIAM KAPPELLE (1980) UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS

Images: Chris Collingwood, Getty

***Below:** An anachronistic depiction of the Battle of Hastings found in a 13th-century chronicle*

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HMS BELFAST

WORDS TOM GARNER WITH THANKS TO MICHAEL SMITH & RACHAEL CAMPBELL

This powerful reminder of Britain's naval might in the early 20th century helped sink the Scharnhorst and led the Allied naval bombardment on D-Day

Located in the heart of central London HMS Belfast is a unique naval survivor from World War II and the Korean War

Image © Imperial War Museum

HMS Belfast is one of the finest surviving examples of a World War II battleship in existence and has an impressive history. It was launched on Saint Patrick's Day in 1938 by the wife of then-Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, and was commissioned into the Royal Navy on 5 August 1939, almost exactly in time for the war. Belfast was the largest cruiser in the fleet, and was immediately called into service patrolling northern waters. However, in November 1939, Belfast struck a mine in the Firth of Forth and the extensive damage took two and a half years to repair.

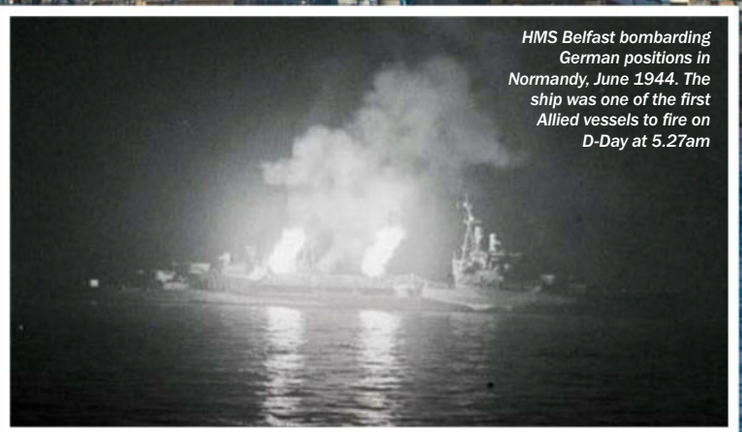
On rejoining the fleet in 1942, Belfast was newly equipped with advanced radar systems and played a crucial role in protecting Arctic convoys, most notably at the Battle of North Cape where it participated in the sinking of the German battleship Scharnhorst. In 1944, Belfast would have been the ship that transported Winston Churchill to the D-Day landings but King George VI prevented him from going. Belfast was among the first ships to open fire on 6 June and spent 33 days at Normandy, expending more than 5,000 shells.

After the end of the war, Belfast played an active role in Korea from 1950-52, working with other naval forces to support United Nations troops and firing more than 8,000 shells during the entire conflict. The ship was later modernised for nuclear warfare before being decommissioned in 1963. Since 1971, Belfast has been a museum ship and is permanently moored in London on the River Thames near Tower Bridge.

"IN 1944, BELFAST WOULD HAVE BEEN THE SHIP THAT TRANSPORTED WINSTON CHURCHILL TO THE D-DAY LANDINGS BUT KING GEORGE VI PREVENTED HIM FROM GOING"

HMS BELFAST

MANUFACTURER: HARLAND AND WOLFF SHIPYARD
COMMISSIONED: 5 AUGUST 1939
LENGTH: 613.6 FEET (187.03 METRES)
BEAM: 69 FEET (21.03 METRES)
DRAUGHT: 19.9 FEET (6.07 METRES)
DISPLACEMENT: 11,175 TONS
SPEED: 32 KNOTS (37 MPH/ 59.5 KM/H)
POWERPLANT: 4 X OIL-FIRED, THREE-DRUM STEAM BOILERS POWERING FOUR PARSONS SINGLE REDUCTION GEARED STEAM TURBINES
ARMAMENT: 12 X 152MM MK XXIII GUNS, 16 X 40 MM TWO-POUNDER ANTI-AIRCRAFT CANNONS, 8 X 13MM ANTI-AIRCRAFT CANNONS
AIR ARM: 2 X SUPERMARINE WALRUS RECON BIPLANES
CREW: 850



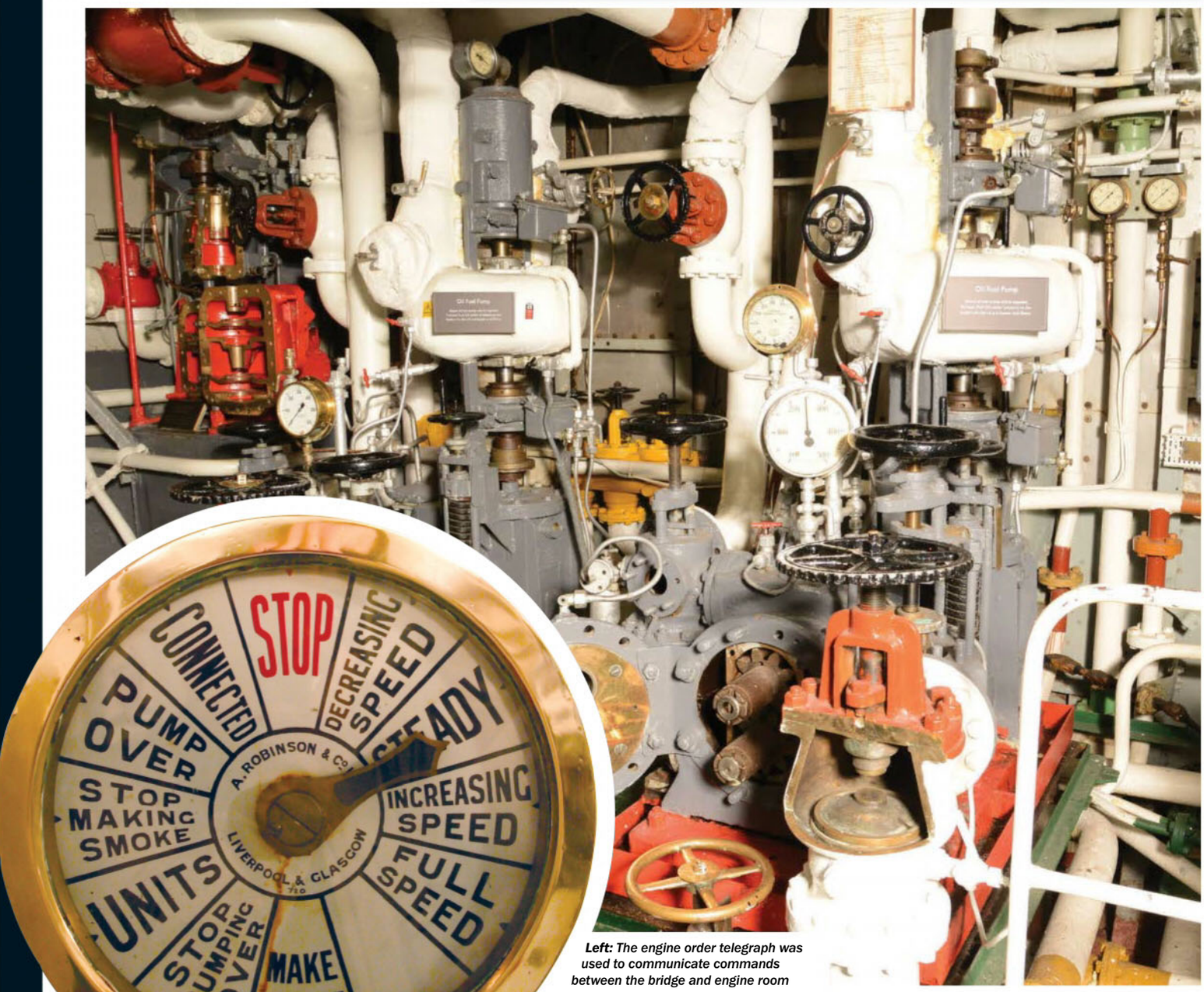
HMS Belfast bombarding German positions in Normandy, June 1944. The ship was one of the first Allied vessels to fire on D-Day at 5.27am

BOILER ROOM AND ENGINES

Belfast's stokers likened stepping into the boiler room to stepping into hell: the temperature ranged between 30-40 degrees Celsius. The complex machinery generated superheated steam at about 400 degrees Celsius to help power the engines. There are four boilers and fuel tanks carrying 2,200 tonnes of oil, and Belfast's four turbine engines rely on unit-propulsion. Each engine has four turbines for pressure, cruising and reversing, and were operated by university-educated artificers. When all four engines were working together, the ship would get through two to three tonnes of oil per hour but this would increase to 26 to 29 tonnes per hour at the full speed of 32 knots.

***Right:** During the 1950s modernisation refit, a panel was installed so that the boilers could be manned from the engine room, thus giving the artificers more control*

***Below:** The working temperatures in the vast labyrinths of the boiler rooms could be extreme, between 30-40 degrees Celsius. Stokers were constantly supplied with lemonade and salt tablets to prevent dehydration*



***Left:** The engine order telegraph was used to communicate commands between the bridge and engine room*

The forward triple turrets of HMS Belfast. Combined with the men in the shell and cordite rooms below, it could take up to 50 men to control one turret

"LOADING AND FIRING ONE GUN CAN TAKE LESS THAN TEN SECONDS AND THE RATE OF FIREPOWER IS EIGHT ROUNDS PER MINUTE"

Each shell weighed 50 kilograms, which the admiralty said was the largest that a man could lift by hand

ARMAMENT

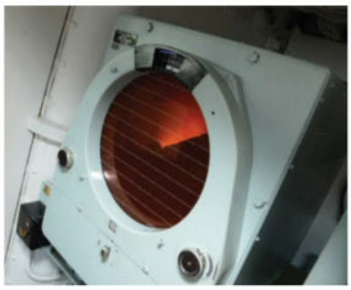
Belfast has multiple triple gun turrets with each one containing a crew of 27. There would be seven men around the breaches, a turret captain, observer, sight-setter, gun trainer, ordnance suppliers and mechanics. The middle barrel in each turret would be set slightly behind the other barrels so that shells wouldn't interfere with each other in flight. Loading and firing one gun could take less than ten seconds and the rate of firepower is eight rounds per-minute. The guns were supplied from shell rooms directly below the turrets. Each room held 600 rounds of ammunition, equating to 2,400 rounds for the whole ship and 200 rounds per gun.

Nine men worked in the shell room, and in heavy action could get 30 rounds of ammunition up to the guns per minute

***Left:** HMS Belfast fires a salvo against enemy troop concentrations on the west coast of Korea in March 1951. The Korean War was the last time Belfast fired its guns on active service*

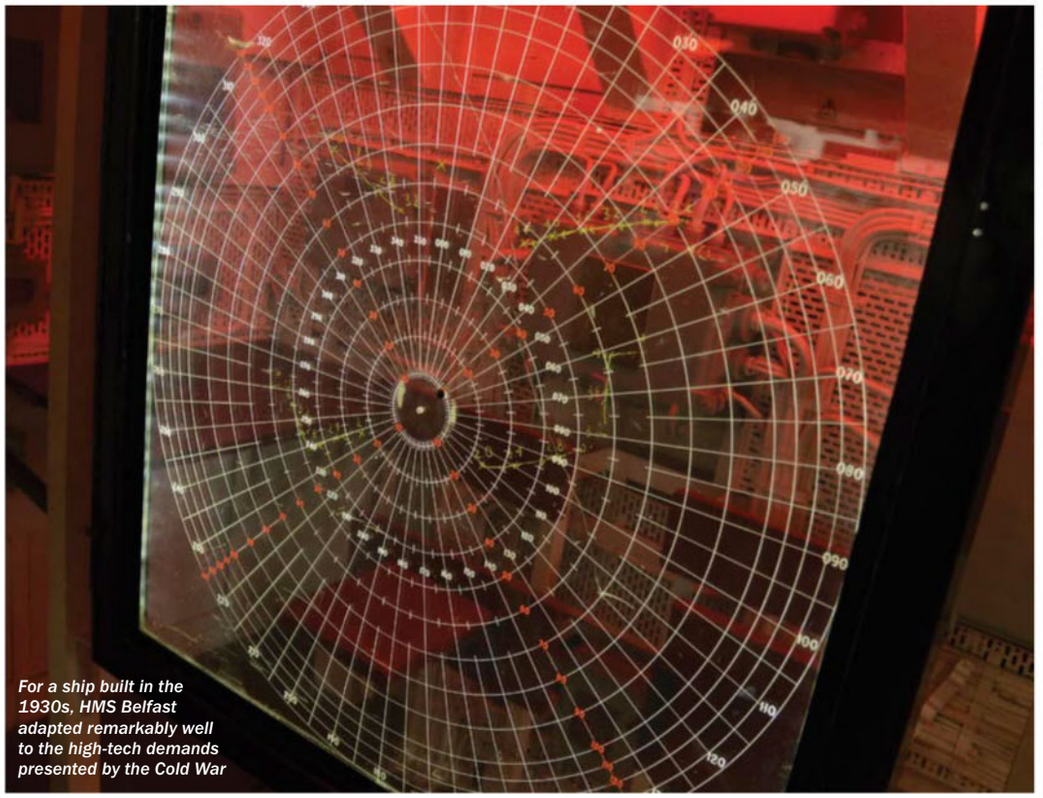
The enclosed bridge was designed to protect the captain in an age of nuclear warfare. It also contains the ship's strikingly mounted main compass (centre)

***Below:** By the 1950s, radar was replacing eyes as the main naval sighting device, which enabled the bridge to be enclosed with a reduced viewing platform*



BRIDGE

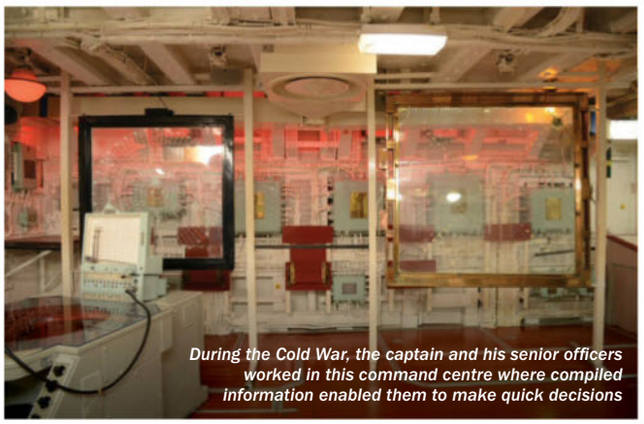
Before the refit of 1956-59, Belfast's bridge was open air, but the captain was moved inside with the advent of nuclear warfare. This is a bridge designed for the Cold War and is positioned at the highest possible level. It also doubles as the main compass platform. Previously, the captain needed a 360-degree view of the surrounding area, but by the 1950s, radar was doing most of the work, enabling the windows to only face forward, port and starboard. There is also no helm as it is stationed in the bottom of the hull. This was so the ship could keep steering if it came under attack.



For a ship built in the 1930s, HMS Belfast adapted remarkably well to the high-tech demands presented by the Cold War

INFORMATION AND TRANSMITTING STATIONS

After 1959, Belfast was a recognisably modern warship. The captain and his main officers would be located in the action information office to act on targets picked up by radar and the direction control tower. The captain could make an informed decision in one spot based on data from readers, chart tables and repeaters. In the transmitting station, there is a mechanical computer from World War II that predates the refit. Exclusively operated by Marines, the computer made calculations about air pressure, wind speed, drift and targets in order to aim and elevate Belfast's guns at precise angles.



During the Cold War, the captain and his senior officers worked in this command centre where compiled information enabled them to make quick decisions

Belfast contains a World War II computer (centre) that calculated the firing angles for the guns. Remarkably, the technology for these machines actually dates back to World War I

Belfast was equipped with two Supermarine Walrus amphibious biplanes that were used to attack submarines. They were launched by catapult and had hangars to store them

WITH THANKS TO THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM WWW.IWM.ORG.UK/VISITS/HMS-BELFAST

TURKEY vs RUSSIA
THE BALKAN RECKONING

WORDS **MIGUEL MIRANDA**

In 1877, two great powers went to war over the Balkan nations in the name of empire and honour – the victor would be able to re-shape the map

The last quarter of the 19th century was an age of wisdom and an age of foolishness. It was, furthermore, the best age to be an empire because any advanced nation-state could maintain a huge conscript army with tremendous firepower. The Prussians, for example, had improved on American mass mobilisation and humiliated the French in 1870 with the thunder of their Krupp guns, the efficiency of their railroads and the sheer deadly force of their new rifles. Otto von Bismarck, once a lowly Junker, had tamed Western Europe and achieved the impossible as the architect of a unified Germany. Even Italy below him, reborn after more than 1,000 years of disunion, posed no threat. The British, while commanding the world's oceans, had little presence on the continent.

To the East, however, were not two but three giants. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was at its peak, while the Russians were still bent on expansion, decades after the folly in Crimea. Beyond the Carpathians and across the majestic Danube, subjugated Christian nations wilted under the Ottoman Empire's heel. Jeered as the 'Sick Man of Europe,' the sultans of Istanbul were, nonetheless, not to be trifled with – they still held Constantinople, subdued over 400 years prior with enormous cannon and superb stratagem. Likewise, Jerusalem and the holy places of Islam, Mecca and Medina were all Ottoman possessions. From the Barbary Coast to the Pyramids of Giza and across the Nile to the Gates of Babylon, the sultan's governors, the pashas, administrated in his name. Ottoman maritime traffic was teaming across the Bosporus, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf, the Suez and Indian Ocean. This so-called 'sick man was maybe ailing, but far from subdued, and certainly not cowed.

Yet a cancer had set long, long ago. The Ottoman navy never recovered from the Lepanto disaster of 1571. Then the rout at Vienna in 1683 had forever checked its appetite for European land. In the age of steam, what was once a bloodthirsty killing machine was now calcified, static, and riven with intrigue.

"BEYOND THE CARPATHIANS AND ACROSS THE MAJESTIC DANUBE, SUBJUGATED CHRISTIAN NATIONS WILTED UNDER THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE'S HEEL"

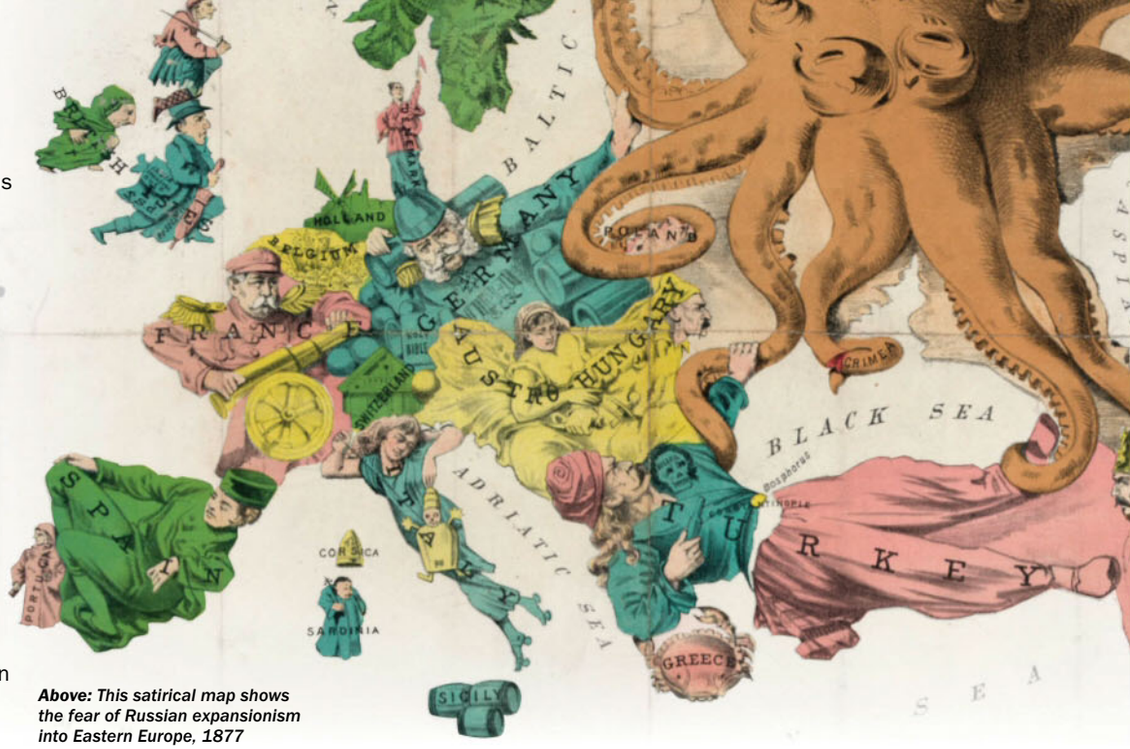
Alexey Popov's painting, 'The Defence Of The Eagle's Nest' from 1877 shows the brutal Battle of Shipka Pass

During one single moment in the 19th century, two devils came to haunt the Ottomans and compound their misery. Which came first remains difficult to ascertain, but it's apparent they sprang forth hand-in-hand: rebellion and war. They were the germ of a nationalist awakening and the Pan-Slavic dream so cherished by the Ottomans' arch-foe: Russia.

Since the time of Tsar Peter the Great, the Russian Empire's so-called 'near abroad,' where the great Central European Plain was broken by rivers and mountains, was a serious preoccupation. At first it was to quash the northern powers – tenacious Sweden and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – before it became a contest with the Ottomans.

Over the span of a century or more, the Russian and Turkish armies would clash perhaps a dozen times – the exact number is contentious. It was always over real estate, parcels of land like the Caucasus or the Crimean Peninsula, that added appendages to growing empires. Yet an incentive for Saint Petersburg, one mixed with the propaganda of defending Christianity, was to play the steward and symbolic elder brother to their Slavic kindred. The idea of a single race aching to unite appears ludicrous, but in the hands of successive tsars and even the Tsarina Catherine, it was the single most reliable justification for marching Russian armies toward Constantinople – the cherished Tsargrad that had sprung Russian civilisation.

It did help that while the Ottomans ruled over the Albanians, Armenians, Bosnians, Bulgars, Circassians, Dalmatians, Kurds, Moldavians, and Serbians for five centuries, their capacity to govern these Christian subjects was fragile at best. Rebellions were common, and in the case of Wallachia and Moldavia, tribute-paying arrangements were the farthest the Ottomans got aside from endless combat. By 1862, the Wallachian and Moldavian leadership agreed on the creation of Romania, and it was Russia who served as its midwife and eventual protector.



***Above:** This satirical map shows the fear of Russian expansionism into Eastern Europe, 1877*

An upstart king

At the onset of the 19th century, the Sublime Porte that ruled the Ottoman Empire's administrative bureaucracy understood that the Serbs and their neighbours were an unruly lot. Though taxes were levied on the Christian populace, matters relating to land, commerce, and the law were made local jurisdictions. Serbia, on the other hand, was a special case.

To keep the encroaching Austro-Hungarian Habsburgs out of Balkan affairs, Istanbul appointed pashas and maintained garrisons in its Christian domains. It took a civil war between the Serbs and the Janissaries – Christians recruited to become the Sultan's praetorians – from 1804 to 1817 before the Sublime Porte allowed the creation of the Principality of Serbia. This was a wise move, given the bothersome task of having to pacify a violent land when the Ottoman Empire's finances were crumbling.

It also unburdened the Balkan pashas of having to deal with Montenegro, the belligerent and inaccessible mountain frontier by the Adriatic Sea, populated by tough highlanders who had no tolerance for the Ottoman tax collectors.

Its new status as a principality meant that Serbia could organise its own government and army, practice its religion, and impose its own taxes, all without having to render anything to the Sublime Porte. It also set the stage for the rise of the Obrenovic dynasty. Hailing from merchants who plied their trade between Serbia and Dalmatia (modern day Croatia), the Obrenovic clan's ascent to nobility began during the long civil wars. Within three generations, they established a royal bloodline. It was Prince Milan Obrenovic who would assemble an army and vie for complete Serbian independence in 1876, which led to another great clash between Saint Petersburg and Istanbul.

The great Serbian rising in 1876 didn't happen in a vacuum, but rather was the culmination of a festering revolt against the Ottomans that originated in neighbouring Herzegovina. Never granted a measure of autonomy, the Sublime Porte still levied peasant labour and exorbitant tithes on these Catholic Christian peasants. The burden rankled all the more as Dalmatia, ever since falling under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was continuing to prosper.

What began with petty disputes among farmers and tax collectors over a bad harvest in the villages of Herzegovina led to a string of random homicides. Throughout 1875, the tide of violence rose to arson, brigandage, and soon full-blown guerrilla war as the Nizam – the regular army of the Ottomans – was deployed in force to subdue the restive peasants.

"OVER THE SPAN OF A CENTURY OR MORE, THE RUSSIAN AND TURKISH ARMIES WOULD CLASH PERHAPS A DOZEN TIMES"

Lev Lagorio's 1891 painting of Russian troops repulsing a Turkish assault against the fortress of Beyazid

THE BALKAN CONFLICT

IN APRIL 1877, RUSSIA AND ITS ALLIES LAUNCHED A TWO-PRONGED ASSAULT ON THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE. THE DANUBE ARMY STRUCK FROM ROMANIA, WHILE ANOTHER FORMATION ATTACKED FROM EASTERN ARMENIA. THE TURKS WERE CAUGHT IN A VICE

1. 22 JANUARY 1862
King Alexander Iona Cuza proclaims the Union of Romanian Principalities. A new country is born.

4. 28 JUNE 1876
The 21-year-old Prince Milan Obrenovic raises the call to arms against the Sublime Porte. The Serbian Army marches to Bulgaria.

3. APRIL-AUGUST 1876
The Ottoman army, along with militia, crush the Bulgarian revolt, massacring thousands of Christian villagers.

5. 24 APRIL 1877
Russia's massive Danube Army uses pontoon bridges to invade Bulgaria.

6. JULY 1877
Small skirmishes take place between the Russian advance guard and Ottoman infantry in Plevna. In one particular battle, the Russians suffer more than 7,000 casualties after being ambushed. Before the month ends, Tsar Alexander II orders additional reinforcements to seize Plevna.

7. 17 JULY 1877
The Russians capture Shipka Pass. The Ottoman defenders withdraw after two days of fighting. Turkish forces attempt to seize Shipka Pass in two long battles fought in August and September; both attempts fail.

10. 10 DECEMBER 1877
Osman Pasha launches his breakout from besieged Plevna. The offensive grinds to a halt and, facing certain death, the injured Osman Pasha surrenders after brief negotiations.

8. AUGUST 1877
32,000 Romanian troops arrive in Plevna to help the Russians. The month is spent fighting over the fortified Grivitsa Redoubts. It is all for nothing.

11. 24 DECEMBER 1877
On Christmas Eve, the Russian Army strikes out of Shipka Pass and drive the Turks south.

2. JULY-AUGUST 1875
Ethnic Serbs in Herzegovina rebel against the local Ottoman administration. The civil war spreads to Serbia and Bulgaria.

9. 18 NOVEMBER 1877
The fortress of Kars falls to General Lazarev's army. The Ottoman Empire's eastern front nearly collapses.

12. 28 DECEMBER 1877
The Ottoman commander, Vessil Pasha and his army of 33,000 men are defeated. There is no longer any credible Turkish forces left in the Balkans.

13. JANUARY 1878
Within the first week of the new year the Russians capture Philippopolis and destroy the last remaining Ottoman garrison until Istanbul. Adrianople is captured within days.

14. 19 JANUARY 1878
The Russian Army reaches San Stefano, almost at the gates of Istanbul, also once known as Constantinople.

15. 18 FEBRUARY 1878
The Ottoman sultan and his envoys agree to the Treaty of San Stefano. A new Bulgarian state will arise and the war officially ends.

HISTORY OF THE BALKANS

IS THIS EUROPE'S TROUBLED DOORSTEP? THE BALKANS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN NEAR THE EDGE OF DISASTER

When the bellicose Oghuz Turks triumphed over Serbia's knights at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, a low-hanging fruit had fallen right into their laps. Soon after, the Albanians, Greeks, Bulgarians and finally Byzantines in their glorious capital would fall under the crescent.

The Ottomans allowed their Christian subjects to live in peace on the condition that they pay an annual head tax reserved for any non-believers. Double standards were imposed on communities when it came to matters concerning the law, education and commerce – Muslims were favoured over others, although different circumstances meant that this wasn't always the case. Guilds could dominate certain professions, villages elected their headmen without supervision, and Jews in particular were valued as physicians and scholars.

The local nobility was often preserved to maintain social order and oversee tribute payments. It was these same nobles who were most likely to rebel when tribute conditions proved exorbitant.

Meanwhile, for hundreds of years it was common practice to levy young Christian men for the elite Janissary Corps . Women, whether slaves or high born, were trafficked to join the harems of wealthy landowners and pashas.

Nationalism arrived in full force during the 19th century and this turned the Balkans into a lesser game – as opposed to the great game in Central Asia – among Europe's powers. The Russo-Turkish War was just another episode of this long drama, which triggered the Great Balkan War in 1912. Of course, who can ever forget Archduke Ferdinand's assassination in Sarajevo? We all know how that ended.

There was no stopping the revolt's momentum. It soon spread to Bulgaria, and it became apparent that the Christian lands of the empire were in mortal danger of being lost. This threat wasn't taken lightly in Istanbul, whose government was being rocked by a totally separate crisis. The city's powerful guilds, the various classes of common labourers, along with religious scholars hungry for political reform, were agitating for an overhaul of the government.

With its armies bogged down in Herzegovina, the pashas sought to quell the Bulgarian crisis by arming local Muslims. These Bashi-Bazouks were supposed to conduct themselves like a semi-professional gendarmerie tasked with keeping public order. It was a vital mission since arms shipments from Romania were suspected of reaching Bulgarian rebels.

What the Bashi-Bazouks did instead was terrorise the local peasantry. Hundreds of villages were burnt and churches were targeted for demolition. If not for the stubborn European diplomats who investigated the conflict in Bulgaria, the atrocities there would have been swept under the rug. Numerous accounts of rapine, arson and plunder inflicted on a Christian population shocked the west, and it played right into Saint Petersburg's hands.

When Serbia mobilised for war, Prince Obrenovic assigned a third of his army – whose total number reached about 70,000 – to General Mikhail Chernyayev. This was no adventurer lusting for combat – the general was a celebrated officer in the Russian army credited with the conquest of Central Asia.

The princes and the pashas

After several months of fighting, Serbia and the Ottoman Empire agreed to a tenuous ceasefire, and this little war at the edge of Europe sent few ripples elsewhere. Vienna, as a matter of fact, was opposed to it, as it could endanger its own possessions in the Balkans.

But for Alexander II, the Serbian crisis was just the latest outrage against the Slavic race. Untold numbers of Russian volunteers had fought for the Obrenovic cause, and the tsar's sentiments compelled him to act against the Ottomans. Raised by private tutors and stern officers, Alexander II's reign was devoted to ensuring liberalism never took hold in Russia. His father, Nicholas I, had reluctantly accepted the throne and struggled to rid his empire of its feudal yoke. But to embrace modernity meant to accept the free market and fraternal values coming from Western Europe.

Nicholas I's reign was marked by several territorial gains for the empire at large, but ended with the disaster in Crimea, when up to 1 million Russians perished in their country's struggle for a toehold in the Black Sea. The tsar never lived to see the end of that war, dying of pneumonia after he caught a fever while reviewing troops. It was his young son, Alexander II, who witnessed its less than satisfactory outcome. Like his

Illustration: Jean-Michel Girard – The Art Agency

***Left:** Prior to the 20th century, Ottoman infantry accounted for the vast majority of battlefield kills*

AN OTTOMAN INFANTRYMAN

ARMED WITH THE FORMIDABLE .44 WINCHESTER, THE OTTOMAN SOLDIER WAS A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

He was probably the finest soldier in Asia. Tough, fatalistic, and a superb marksman, the 19th-century Ottoman soldier wrought sheer terror on the attacking Russians in multiple engagements. Recognisable for his characteristic fez hat and salvar trousers, the Ottoman soldier in the Nizam was a certified menace when equipped with either a standard issue Peabody Martini or a .44 Winchester.

"TOUGH, FATALISTIC, AND SUPERB MARKSMEN, THE 19TH-CENTURY OTTOMAN SOLDIER WROUGHT SHEER TERROR ON THE RUSSIANS"

"WITH THE RUSSIAN MILITARY BACK TO ITS FORMER STRENGTH BY 1876, A CONFRONTATION WITH THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE REPRESENTED A LONG OVERDUE SETTLING OF ACCOUNTS"

Russian troops pour over the Grivitsa redoubt during the Siege of Plevna

father before him, he ruled over an autocratic regime dependent on a feudal system. Discontent among the Russian intelligentsia, which counted the inveterate gambler Fyodor Dostoyevsky among its ranks, and the ominous rumours of anarchist plots meant the domestic scene was far from tranquil.

With the Russian military back to its former strength by 1876, a confrontation with the Ottoman Empire represented a long overdue settling of accounts. To go forth and wrest the Balkans from Istanbul was a perfect diversion that would bolster Russia's stature. Within a matter of months, an enormous invasion force called the Danube Army had assembled in Romania, whose government fielded auxiliaries to support the Russians.

At the onset of 1877, the Russians had three advantages. First was the element of surprise; second was flawless mobilisation with additional conscripted manpower available in surplus; third was the support of the oppressed Bulgars, who welcomed the beneficence of Alexander II.

The Ottomans, however, were disadvantaged in many ways. Despite the home advantage in the Balkans, the past few years had alienated the Sublime Porte and the army's garrisons. The Nizam were as good as their counterparts in Europe, but their numbers were spread too thin and their cavalry, which still mattered in the 19th century, added little to their capabilities.

Another subtle weakness could be found by a close reading of historical accounts. The Ottoman Empire didn't have a credible industrial base to furnish itself for total war. Its cannon were imported from the Krupp, the rifles from the United States, and its fortress garrisons, such as Kars, were constructed with British help. On a subtler note, the sultan's finances were dependent on lines of credit provided by London's merchant banks. The Ottoman Empire was a net importer of merchandise, running a deficit and this, coupled with inept bureaucracy, meant that the shock of invasion was never anticipated, or prepared for.

This explains why, after formal declaration of war on 24 April, three huge columns led by the cream of the Russian aristocracy, with Grand Duke Nikolay Nikolaevich Romanov at their head, crossed the Danube without trouble. Their goal was nothing short of liberating the Balkans and retaking Constantinople, a singular event that would throw the Turks back across the Bosporus and into Asia forever. The grand climax of the Pan-Slavic struggle was near.

Rather than a series of breathtaking manoeuvres and decisive clashes, the war that caught the Western world's attention hinged on two crucial battles. The first was the protracted Siege of Plevna, where the Russians sought to annihilate the largest

THE FALL OF KARS, 1877

THE ANCIENT CAPITAL HAD LONG BEEN AN IMPREGNABLE FORTRESS BRISTLING WITH GUNS. ITS SOLE PURPOSE: TO KEEP THE RUSSIANS IN CHECK

The Ottomans understood the threat posed by Russian forces in the Caucasus. This is why, after the Crimean War, Istanbul acquired Kars in exchange for Sevastopol, and spent untold sums improving its defences. Located on a rocky edifice that offered a superb view of the surrounding countryside, Kars boasted 330 mortars and guns affixed upon its battlements, together with layers of trenches and bunkers.

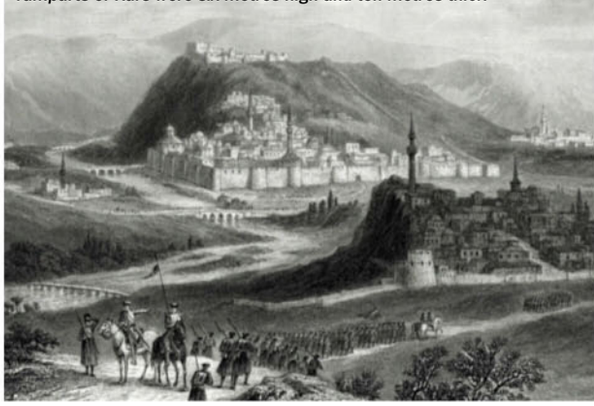
When the Russians invaded from Romania in April 1877, a smaller theatre was launched in Eastern Turkey, where a separate 28,000-strong army led by General Ivan Lazarev was tasked with capturing the impregnable fortress. A tall order, since the Turks had just as many soldiers in Kars and six times more artillery.

The campaign enjoyed a string of small victories at first and then on 6 September, its momentum was stopped when a failed assault left 6,000 Russians dead. Knowing the Turks could eventually deploy greater numbers, General Lazarev first routed a large detachment outside Kars by counter-attacking at night. Another Russian army defeated a Turkish garrison outside Yerevan, leaving the Ottoman heartland vulnerable to further penetration.

With the fortress now cut off, in late October the Russians started their bombardment of Kars. Two weeks later they successfully assaulted its defences and overcame the garrison, suffering more than 2,000 casualties. Several thousand Turks perished in the defence of Kars while 17,000 surrendered on 18 November. It was a poor showing for the Ottomans who were fighting better on the Bulgarian front. Russian forces in the Trans-Caucasus would eventually reach the city of Erzurum and, as Adrianople fell on 8 January, it became obvious to the Sublime Porte their survival hinged on their surrender.

The Kars fortress then became a Russian outpost after the Treaty of San Stefano. It changed hands again when Turkey seized it in 1918 after the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and reclaimed its Armenian territories all the way to Yerevan's outskirts.

According to the best intelligence the Russians had, the ramparts of Kars were six metres high and ten metres thick



Officers look on as Russian infantry prepare to advance during the Siege of Plevna

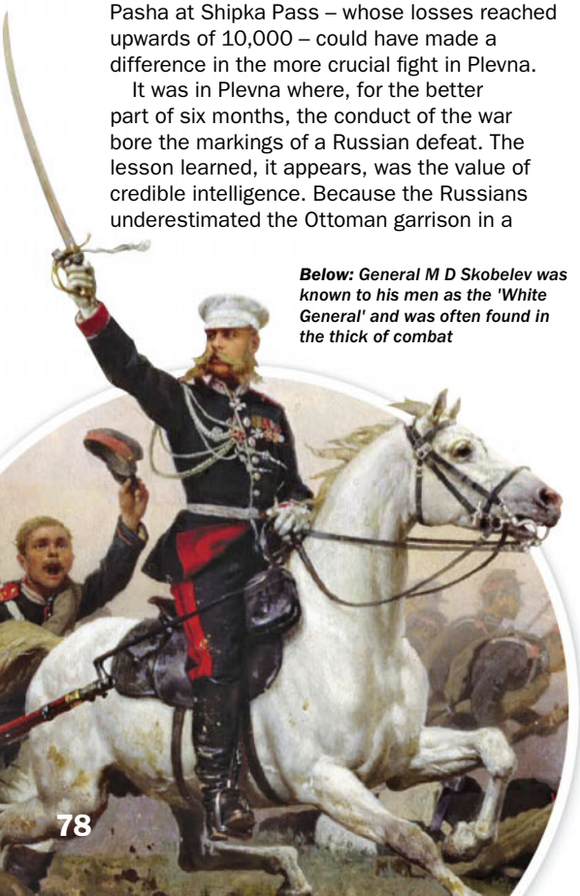
Ottoman garrison in Bulgaria. The second was to secure the mountain passes leading to Serbia, Greece, and inevitably, the capital.

Crazy Ivan meets Mr Winchester

The Battle of Shipka Pass is proof of the time-tested saying of he who dares, wins. Having crossed the Danube virtually unopposed, in three months the Russian advanced guard reached the Balkan mountain range. In July 1877, the advanced detachment of General Iosif Gurko secured the narrow trail known as Shipka, which shared its name with a nearby village. The guard's main objective was the Ottoman stronghold of Adrianople but Shipka was essential for a supply train should a siege be necessary.

The battle itself wasn't a singular cataclysm involving vast formations. Rather, the Turks, having been caught unprepared, vainly sought to drive the Russians back. Almost continuous fighting from July to August resulted in a clear-cut Turkish defeat – the Russians held onto the high ground and any attacking force had little room for manoeuvre. Another blow to the Turks is that the battalions commanded by Suleiman Pasha at Shipka Pass – whose losses reached upwards of 10,000 – could have made a difference in the more crucial fight in Plevna.

It was in Plevna where, for the better part of six months, the conduct of the war bore the markings of a Russian defeat. The lesson learned, it appears, was the value of credible intelligence. Because the Russians underestimated the Ottoman garrison in a small Bulgarian town, what started as a bloody ambush on 8 July turned into a costly siege that dragged on for the rest of the year.



***Below:** General M D Skobelev was known to his men as the 'White General' and was often found in the thick of combat*

Thanks to the leadership of Osman Pasha, a gallant commander in both word and deed, some 30,000 Ottoman soldiers held off over 100,000 Russians under unbelievable circumstances. For Osman, preparation was the key. Before the Russians could reach their full strength, he had the outskirts of Plevna sown with trenches and redoubts.

His troops also had a secret weapon: the American lever-action .44 Winchester. Given its accuracy and rate of fire, it was a devastating rifle at close range and so, the tactic was to pick off the Russians with the Peabody Martini rifles from 1,000 metres away. When the Slavs were close enough to eyeball, the Turks switched to their Winchesters and mowed them down. It's believed most of the 30,000 Russians killed at Plevna were slain using Winchesters during fierce battles across both July and August.

Russian arms, by comparison, were at a disadvantage during Plevna. Old breach-loading Krnka muskets and Berdan rifles weren't as good as what the Turks had. The Russian Cossacks and Dragoons didn't make a difference. Neither overwhelming artillery bombardment nor the heroic charges of Bulgarian and Romanian infantry sapped the defenders' vigour. By September, the Russians decided to let the winter punish Osman Pasha's men instead.

The epic engagement at Plevna became a Turkish loss owing to poor judgement and desperate miscalculation. His army low on supplies, Osman Pasha led his forces in a breakout. But he hadn't counted on how stubborn the Russians were. Losing his horse and wounded in the leg, with his flanks overrun and without food in the dead of winter, the wounded commander didn't dare risk a battle that would've killed so many of his valiant but exhausted soldiers.

Soon after he surrendered his army, it was no less than Grand Duke Nikolay Romanov who returned the pasha's sword. A small gesture to a general who had turned a minor skirmish into a fierce and great battle. Today Plevna, now known as Pleven, remembers its battle as a riveting historical episode. But it is Shipka Pass and what happened there that is treasured by Bulgaria as a defining moment on its long journey to independence.

By January 1878, Suleiman Pasha, who failed to dislodge the Russians at Shipka Pass, was defeated at Philippopolis, and Adrianople was in Russian hands by 8 January. Meanwhile, in the east, Russian divisions from Armenia had overrun the Kars fortress and were driving deeper into the Ottoman heartland. It was apparent Sultan Abdel Hamid and Istanbul were now under serious threat. There was neither time nor money left to prosecute a counteroffensive. A humiliating peace was preferable to the loss of an empire and its regime. This was settled at San Stefano on 3 March. The Russians, inspired by their victory, pressed for the establishment of a Greater Bulgaria. It was an enormous country that reached the Greek border and united the Balkan Slavs.

Fearful of Tsar Alexander II dominating Southern Europe, a separate conference was held in Berlin. The European powers limited the expanse of the Bulgarian state and achieved fairer terms for the Ottomans. Hence Russia's gains didn't translate into power over its European rivals. Berlin and Vienna were secure and fielded better armies. Besides, within a decade the very same Balkan states liberated by Tsar Alexander II were fighting among themselves, with Serbia and Bulgaria clashing in 1885. The Balkans would then become engulfed in a regional tiff leading into 1914. Even with the slow conglomeration of what would become Yugoslavia in the mid-20th century, the seeds of discord and ethnic strife were long planted.

So what did the Russo-Turkish War achieve? Within 40 years, both the Ottoman and Russian Empires were swept into the dustbin of history. Sultan Abdul Hamid himself would live long enough to witness his world come to an end. Tsar Alexander II, on the other hand, was killed by terrorists three years after the triumph over the Turks. The Balkan states, bestowed the gift of self-determination, were to bleed each other in both World Wars. But in 1878, Russian force of arms had allowed Serbia and Bulgaria to gain their freedom.

FURTHER READING

- **THE RUSSO-TURKISH WAR: A STRATEGICAL SKETCH** BY SIR FREDERICK MAURICE
- **THE RUSSO-TURKISH WAR** BY R G BARNWELL

Images: Alamy, Getty

Heroes of the Medal of Honor

ALEXANDER BONNYMAN JR

Storming ashore at Tarawa, this First Lieutenant led his Marines across a pier swept by enemy fire to clear the way across the islet of Betio

WORDS **MICHAEL E HASKEW**

The islet of Betio, shaped like a parrot, is the principal landmass of Tarawa atoll in the Gibert Islands of the Pacific. It is only two miles long, 800 yards across at its widest point, and its 291 acres encompass roughly half as much ground as New York's Central Park. In 1943, however, yard-for-yard, Betio was quite probably the most heavily defended territory on Earth.

When he arrived on the tiny islet that August, Rear Admiral Keiji Shibazaki was impressed with the stout defences constructed during the 18 months since the Japanese had seized Tarawa following US entry into World War II. Three days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese troops and Korean labourers had occupied and begun fortifying the islet to strengthen the Imperial "absolute defence zone."

Eventually, Betio was fairly bristled with concrete blockhouses, pillboxes, bunkers reinforced with coconut logs and tons of sand, and machine-gun nests. More than 40 artillery emplacements also studded the islet.

Shibasaki stood before the garrison of Betio, which had grown to more than 4,000 including 2,600 men of the elite 6th Yokosuka Special Naval Landing Force, waved his samurai sword in the air, and bellowed: "A million men cannot take Tarawa in a hundred years!"

Shibasaki, however, had not yet encountered the Leathernecks of the 2nd Marine Division, men like 1st Lieutenant Alexander 'Sandy' Bonnyman, executive officer, 2nd Battalion Shore Party, 8th Marines. For the Americans, Operation Galvanic, the assault on Tarawa, was the first offensive step of the Central Pacific Campaign, the island road to Tokyo that would cover thousands of miles of ocean and culminate with the Japanese surrender two years later. Tarawa had to be taken by storm. Men like Bonnyman made capturing the "impregnable" Betio possible – despite Shibasaki's boast – in a remarkable four days of hellish fighting.

The 2nd Marine Division hit the beaches at Tarawa on the morning of 20 November 1943. The landing zones – codenamed Red Beaches One, Two and Three – stretched across the breast and belly of the Betio parrot. A shortage of amphibious LVTs (Landing Vehicle, Tracked), popularly known as amtracs, meant that most of the Marines would ride towards the embattled shoreline in LCVPs (Landing Craft Vehicle, Personnel), or Higgins Boats. However, the LCVPs could not traverse the coral reef that ringed the 17-mile-long, nine-mile wide lagoon that fronted the chosen landing beaches.

Three waves of amtracs began churning toward the line of departure, 6,000 yards from the beaches, at 8.24am. These were followed by two waves of LCVPs. Pre-invasion naval and air bombardment were ineffective against the reinforced Japanese fortifications, and when the cascade of bombs and shells lifted, the defenders of Betio exited their underground safe spaces, manned their guns, and poured devastating fire into the oncoming Marines.

Japanese troops manning positions on the ocean side of Betio began rushing toward the lagoon side as reinforcements. When the amtracs were within 3,000 yards, the defenders' guns barked and stuttered. As the LCVPs started to hang up on the reef, fighting men were forced to exit their landing craft and wade hundreds of yards to shore under a torrent of enemy bullets and shells.

To the right, a deadly Japanese crossfire converged on an inlet at Red Beach One, cutting down Marines while mortars and artillery, pre-registered on the beaches, scored direct hits on amtracs that cleared the reef. To the Marines' left, a 500-yard-long pier jutted into the lagoon at the junction of Red Beaches Two and Three. Japanese machine guns and rifles chattered away at the Marines in this sector, as well as from the hulk of the half-sunken freighter Saida Maru, struck by American dive bombers early in the action.

All along the beaches, Marines were being chopped to pieces. Some sought cover along a five-foot seawall near the water's edge. Others tried to dig in. Numerous units lost their senior commanders in short order. West of the pier at Red Beach Two, Lieutenant Colonel Herbert R Amey tried to rally his beleaguered men, raising his Colt pistol and shouting, "Come on! These bastards can't stop us!" Immediately, he was riddled with machine-gun bullets. Lieutenant Colonel Walter Jordan, an officer of the 4th Marine Division who had come along as an observer, took command of the 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines and quickly learned that one company was pinned down while another had lost five of six officers.

By the end of the first day, the Marines managed to maintain a toehold on the beaches of Betio. The deepest penetrations at Red Two and Three were a mere 250 yards. A 600 yard-gap separated Marines on Red Beach One from a small enclave that had inadvertently landed at Green Beach along the parrot's beak, which was relatively undefended and perpendicular to the slaughter on the Red Beaches.

The only Marine battalion to land relatively intact on the morning of 20 November was Major Henry P Crowe's 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, at Red Beach Three. They came ashore east of the pier where the destroyers Ringgold and Dashiell glided into the lagoon and sprayed accurate fire support at enemy positions. Bonnyman realised that Japanese guns had pinned down a large number of Marines at the end of the pier and quickly assumed the initiative.

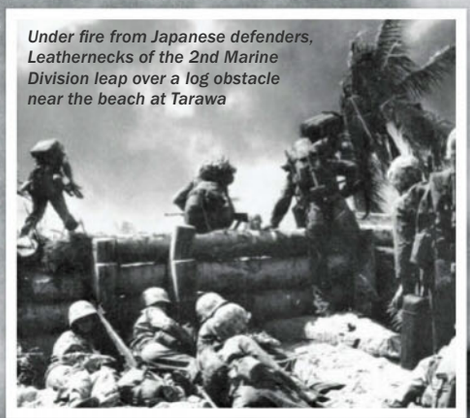
Bonnyman's posthumous Medal of Honor citation reads that he "…repeatedly defied

"He was a good, likable guy, but he took no guff. His attitude was, 'You've got a job to do; you'd better do it'"

Former Marine Sergeant Leroy Kisling

US Marine First Lieutenant Alexander Bonnyman received a posthumous Medal of Honor for valour during the 76-hour battle for the islet of Betio

US Marine Corps



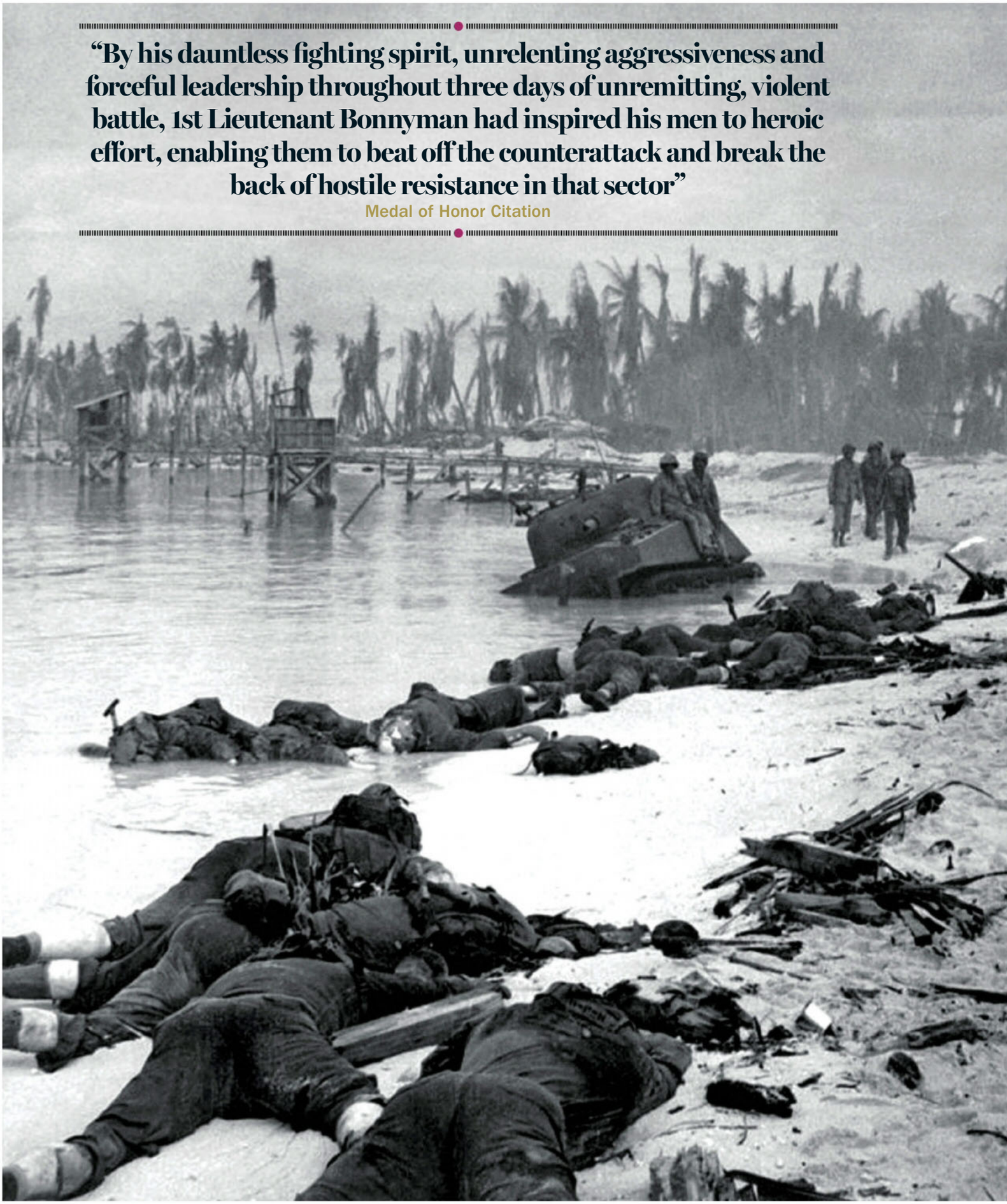
Under fire from Japanese defenders, Leathernecks of the 2nd Marine Division leap over a log obstacle near the beach at Tarawa

Disabled by enemy fire, this Marine LVT lies astride the seawall at Red Beach One on the islet of Betio, Tarawa atoll

Marine Lieutenant Alexander Bonnyman, possibly fourth from right, leads his men to the roof of a Japanese blockhouse on Betio

"By his dauntless fighting spirit, unrelenting aggressiveness and forceful leadership throughout three days of unremitting, violent battle, 1st Lieutenant Bonnyman had inspired his men to heroic effort, enabling them to beat off the counterattack and break the back of hostile resistance in that sector"

Medal of Honor Citation



After the battle for Betio, Marines walk among the bodies of their dead comrades and sit atop a wrecked Sherman tank

the blasting fury of the enemy bombardment to organize and lead the besieged men over the long, open pier to the beach and then, voluntarily obtaining flamethrowers and demolitions, organized his pioneer shore party into assault demolitionists and directed the blowing of several hostile installations before the close of D-Day."

During the harrowing night that followed, the Marines on the vulnerable Red Beaches braced for a Japanese counterattack that never materialised. Approximately 5,000 Marines had landed on Betio, and 30 per cent of these were killed, wounded or missing. However, the Japanese had suffered mightily as well. Many of their officers had been killed, and their communications had been disrupted to such an extent that there was no hope of mounting a co-ordinated counterthrust.

Still, the early hours of the second day were as deadly as the first. Marine reinforcements were riddled by enemy small arms. The 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, last of the immediate reserves, took 350 casualties among its 800-man complement, due to murderous fire from the hulk of the Saida Maru and the relentless fusillade from Japanese emplacements ringing Red Beaches Two and Three. The Marines on the thin ribbon of shoreline faced an agonising choice: remain where they were and suffer, or attempt to silence the enemy guns. They got moving.

The Marines on Green Beach were reinforced. Working in tandem with the few tanks that made it ashore, they began a successful flank attack across the islet. Meanwhile, here and there, teams of Marines took on the enemy bunkers and blockhouses with hand grenades, explosive satchel charges and flamethrowers. Yard by yard, pillbox by pillbox, the Marines advanced from the Red Beaches across the airstrip in the middle of Betio.

At about 4pm, Colonel Robert Shoup, commanding the 2nd Marine Regiment, was confident enough to radio to senior officers offshore: "Casualties: many. Percentage dead: unknown. Combat efficiency: we are winning."

Orders for the third day of fighting on Betio were straightforward. The gains on Green Beach were to be exploited while a Japanese salient between Red Beaches One and Two was to be eliminated, and the two battalions of the 8th Marines on Red Beach Three were to attack eastward.

The triple threat of a coconut log bunker with multiple machine guns, a steel reinforced pillbox, and a large blockhouse that was supposedly Shibasaki's headquarters confronted Crowe's Marines on Red Beach Three. Around 9.30am, a Marine mortar round scored a direct hit on the ammunition compartment for the coconut log bunker, blowing the entire structure sky high. An M4 Sherman medium tank nicknamed Colorado fired a 75mm round that cracked open the pillbox. The enemy grip on Red Beach Three had begun to slip, but the blockhouse continued to belch deadly rifle and machine-gun fire.

Early morning on the third day a Japanese message, possibly sent by Shibasaki, had relayed the desperate situation to Tokyo. "Our weapons have been destroyed. From now on everyone is attempting a final charge. May Japan exist for 10,000 years." If he was alive and in the blockhouse, he had minutes to live.

The heavily fortified blockhouse was the highest point on Betio, and flank attacks had been thrown back with severe losses. Apparently, the only way to silence the structure was to gain its rooftop and drop grenades or explosive charges down the air vents to force the enemy out. Lieutenant Bonnyman led five engineers across 40 yards of open ground under covering fire. Bonnyman clawed his way up the sandy slope to the roof of the blockhouse as dozens of Japanese troops emerged to fight. The 33-year-old lieutenant opened up a flamethrower on several of them, emptied his M1 carbine into others, and then killed three more before he was shot down in a hail of enemy gunfire.

As the Japanese recoiled in disorder, Bonnyman's body tumbled down the slope. Inspired by his actions, the remaining engineers detonated explosives while enemy soldiers swarmed out of the blockhouse. Colorado took out 20 of them with a single canister round, and a bulldozer piled mounds of sand against firing slits that remained active.

The Marines on Red Beach Three had finally silenced their supreme tormenter. The blackened corpses of more than 200 Japanese troops were found inside the blockhouse, but Admiral Shibasaki's body was never positively identified.

Bonnyman's citation continues: "Assailed by additional Japanese after he had gained his objective, he made a heroic stand on the edge of the structure, defending his strategic position with indomitable determination in the face of the desperate charge… before he fell, mortally wounded."

The courage of 1st Lieutenant Alexander Bonnyman broke the stalemate of death and destruction on Red Beach Three, while other acts of bravery helped turn the tide at Tarawa for good. After Betio was declared secure on 23 November, only 17 Japanese troops and 129 Korean labourers survived. A total of 1,056 Marines and US Navy personnel were killed and nearly 2,300 wounded.

The Marines learned valuable lessons at Tarawa, including the need for plunging fire to affect results during preliminary shore bombardment, better communications, and more tracked landing vehicles. The Japanese learned that Marines, like Lieutenant Bonnyman, were willing to give their lives in combat – and that there were others like him.

The lieutenant was interred in a cemetery on Betio, but the exact location of the burial site was obscured. Bonnyman's 12-year-old daughter, Frances, accepted her father's posthumous Medal of Honor during a ceremony in 1947. It was one of four Medals of Honor awarded for heroism at Tarawa.

In the spring of 2015, more than 71 years later, the cemetery was rediscovered on Betio. On 27 September, the Marine hero was buried with military honours in Knoxville, Tennessee.

FURTHER READING

- **ACROSS THE REEF:** THE MARINE ASSAULT OF TARAWA, MARINES WORLD WAR II COMMEMORATIVE SERIES BY COLONEL JOSEPH H ALEXANDER, USMC (RET)
- **ONE SQUARE MILE OF HELL:** THE BATTLE FOR TARAWA BY JOHN WUKOVITS

CONGO
The heart of darkness

For centuries, madness and savagery blighted Africa's Garden of Eden. Is there hope for this land ruled by warlords and murderous armies?

WORDS **MIGUEL MIRANDA**

A lot of things fell to pieces in the 1990s, whether ailing world powers or financial markets. Most tragic was the moral and social collapse of Central Africa. What used to be the exclusive domain of bloodthirsty tyrants – Uganda's Idi Amin comes to mind – became a geographical expanse that erupted into a no-holds-barred fratricidal war.

The worst of it was in Rwanda. Over the span of three months in 1994, Hutu mobs and soldiers butchered almost 1 million people. Their main target was the Tutsi ethnic group, but tens of thousands more were killed. The Rwandan genocide reminded the world, most poignantly the UN, that humanity's worst excesses were not locked away in the past.

By 1995 a ragtag guerilla army called the Rwandan Patriotic Front, led by Tutsis, had seized control of Rwanda. Their officers, including the would-be President Paul Kagame, were certain those who perpetrated the genocide had fled to neighbouring Zaire, where overcrowded refugee camps had absorbed the desperate fleeing from a country's near-suicide.

With the help of neighbours Uganda, now under the imperious Yoweri Museveni's rule after its own hard-fought civil war, the Rwandans overran Eastern Zaire and scattered the unruly Hutus, who formed their own bush armies out of necessity and self-preservation. So in the mid-1990s, the civil war in Rwanda was now being fought in a different country, whose natural resources were an irresistible lure for the belligerents wanting to profit from these riches.

This mortal struggle reverberated all the way to Kinshasa, the capital that occupied the former colonial bastion of Leopoldville, where Mobutu Sese Seko had ruled by decree for the past three decades. During his last year in office the man formerly known as Joseph Mobutu was no longer himself, isolated in a dictator's bubble of paranoia and gross negligence, his kingdom long impoverished. In a different era Mobutu announced himself to the world when he seized power during a 1965 coup d'etat, where he betrayed the scheming incumbent President Joseph Kazavubu and forever washed his hands of the murder of Patrice Lumumba in 1961, a crime that robbed Congo of its first prime minister and founding father.

With blessings from Washington, Paris, and Brussels, Mobutu started out with an unchallenged mandate to rule, with grandiose visions of modernising his country. But he resorted to reinventing Congo as Zaire in a sudden fit of nationalist revisionism. A personality cult soon followed and Mobutu never travelled without his leopard skin hat and colourful suits. His lavish lifestyle, including the construction of a palatial residence that would put Louis XIV to shame, soon contrasted the abject poverty of his Zaireans.

To match his vision for a proud African republic, Mobutu abandoned his Christian name and adopted a hyperbolic official title. When read in plain English it seemed poetic: Mobutu was an "all conquering warrior who, because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, will go from conquest to conquest leaving fire in his wake." Or Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Waza Banga for short.

But the rechristening all those years ago might have been done with tongue firmly in cheek. What passed for the Zairean army was a joke, an ill-equipped rabble with a long history of terrorism and plunder that visited poor people. On one occasion, when Zaire's southern frontier of Katanga rose in revolt, Mobutu reportedly deployed hunters armed with bows and arrows to repel them.

A COUNTRY BLEEDING TO DEATH

1491
Nzinga Nkuwu is baptised by Portuguese missionaries, beginning 500 years of Roman Catholicism in the Congo. Nkuwu's son Afonso I succeeds him after a brief civil war and strengthens the faith.

1885
The Congo Free State, run by the agents of Belgium's King Leopold II, emerges as a major exporter of rubber. Natives whose output falls below their quota are tortured to death.

1908
Uproar over the atrocities in the Congo Free State compels Belgium to annex the whole territory and run it alongside racist colonial lines. Improvements to the Congolese's welfare are the bare minimum.

A child salutes through the barbed wire that surrounds a UN compound in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo

"THE MAN FORMERLY KNOWN AS JOSEPH MOBUTU WAS NO LONGER HIMSELF, ISOLATED IN A DICTATOR'S BUBBLE OF PARANOIA AND GROSS NEGLIGENCE, HIS KINGDOM LONG IMPOVERISHED"


THE YOUNG
DR CONGO

Mobutu, who was once the toast of the White House, found himself removed from power and near penniless, forced to seek refuge in Morocco. He died within months of being diagnosed with prostate cancer and with his passing, the Sun forever set on Zaire.

An abundance of Josephs

In Kinshasa, the new President Laurent Désiré Kabila consolidated his rule with the help of his kadogos, or child soldiers, who had joined the liberation army that marched on Mobutu's capital. Here was a new archetype in the African continent, the vengeful rebel who would revive the nation. Similar types would leave their mark on Zimbabwe, Rwanda and Eritrea. For Laurent Kabila, his natural charm concealed a complete lack of ideas on how to run his country. Besides, it was the Rwandans and Ugandans who bolstered his rise to power with their support for the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL).

Kabila abolished Zaire and ushered the rebirth of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This was to be his lasting achievement, for he soon began quarrelling with his patrons. This was the motivation for what became the Second Congo War. This war was a scramble for the natural resources of a failed state, one that drew at least a dozen armies from across Central Africa.

Resenting how the Tutsis in Rwanda were pillaging Eastern Congo with the help of Uganda and Burundi, Kabila solicited aid from Angola, Chad, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe to bolster his fledgling legions, which he re-organised as the national armed forces, or FARDC. But this was to be his undoing, for Kabila had forgotten to reward his most loyal subjects, the kadogos, with salaries and shelter. It's believed a child soldier, a familiar sight in the Congo's Kabila-era military, shot him with a pistol in the safety of his own office.

Within a matter of days Kabila's son inherited his father's throne. It's thought Joseph Kabila was incentivised by Angola's President Fernando Dos Santos. With Angolan troops mired in the DRC against the rebel group UNITA led by Jonas Savimbi, who was using an air freight smuggling route to finance illegal diamond trafficking from the Southern Congo, Luanda had enough reason to put their man in Kinshasa.

Within a year of his nascent presidency, a rebel group arose in the north east determined to overthrow him. The Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC) was led by another upstart warlord called Jean-Pierre Bemba. He was a successful European-educated businessman who flourished in the import-export business during the late Mobutu era. With a little help from Ugandan advisers, he managed to launch a paramilitary career, raise his own army and vie for power.

"HERE WAS A NEW ARCHETYPE IN THE AFRICAN CONTINENT, THE VENGEFUL REBEL WHO WOULD REVIVE THE NATION"

But the MLC represented yet another pillaging legion mired in Eastern Congo during the last stretch of the Second Congo War, an ordeal that never produced its own dashing victors or glorious battles. To placate the MLC, Kabila allowed Bemba to serve as his vice president until the general elections in 2006. After losing badly in the polls, Bemba broke with Kinshasa and relocated to Belgium, where he has since run afoul of The Hague.

Wandering bands of angry Hutus, invading Rwandans; local brigands called the Mai Mai, a militia from Uganda; and the brutal FARDC are the factions responsible for allowing Eastern Congo to sink further and further into the depths of hell. The worst of the worst were the raiding parties sent by Joseph Kony, the pseudo-messianic cult leader behind the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Facing stiff resistance from Uganda's armed forces, the radical Christian group sought refuge in the Congo where it perpetrated kidnappings and rapes on a horrific scale.

For Joseph Kabila, who eschewed the pomp and decadence of previous African dictators for a business suit, he had the benefit of a fresh start and international recognition. The DRC might have remained a corrupt hellhole on his watch, but when national elections were held in 2006, he came out on top and the world applauded. The economy was on the rise, and the violence in the east was beginning to recede. Surely, brighter days lay ahead.

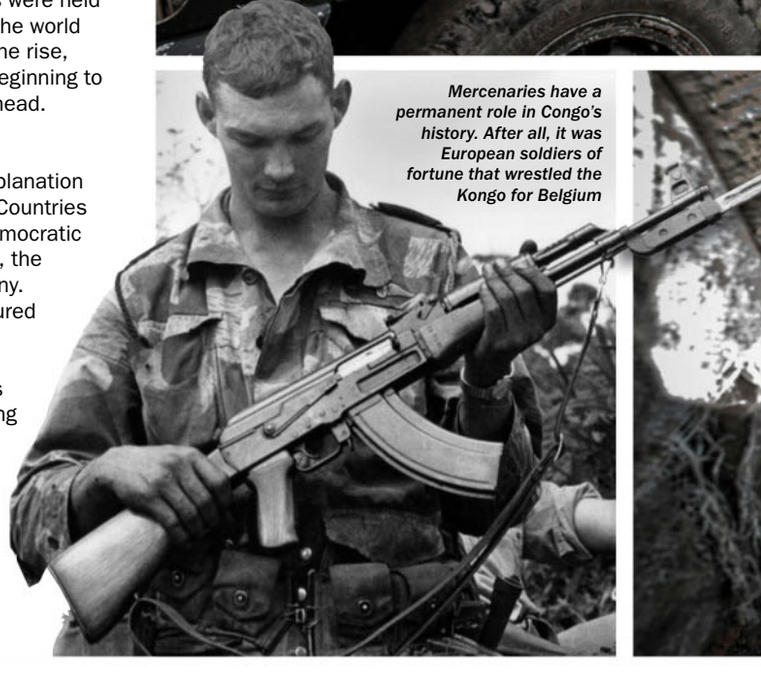
The Genocidaires

There's not a single convenient explanation for the Congo's present miseries. Countries do struggle to exist, but for the Democratic Republic fashioned by the Kabila's, the struggle has been a long-term agony.

Perhaps Adam Hochschild captured it best in his seminal historical exposé *King Leopold's Ghost*. In it, he examined how a single feckless European overlord, the well-meaning sovereign of Belgium, subjugated an ancient country and laid down oppression and cruelty as permanent institutions governing the lives of its people.

Going by its historic name, the Kongo was an enormous river that flowed with immense force toward a tributary in the lands of

Nyatura soldiers prepare to escort a shipment of minerals from Rubaya, in DR Congo, to the market in Rwanda



Mercenaries have a permanent role in Congo's history. After all, it was European soldiers of fortune that wrestled the Kongo for Belgium

1960
With Congo granted independence, the Katanga region known for its copper and uranium mines attempts to break away. A bloody rebellion ensues involving UN troops, the Belgian army, the CIA and European mercenaries.

1961
Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba is arrested and killed by his captors. It's believed the CIA originally wanted to poison him but instead he was executed by opposition forces.

1963
UN forces together with CIA air support and mercenary columns overrun the Katanga enclave and end the war. The immense Congo remains intact and peaceful for the time being.

1965
With his relationship with President Joseph Kazavubu deteriorating, Major General Joseph Mobutu launches a coup d'etat on 25 November and takes over. He renames the country Zaire in 1971.

1994
The Rwandan genocide kills nearly 1 million people and triggers a regional humanitarian crisis. When a Tutsi-led guerilla army drives out the Hutus from Kigali, preparations are made for an invasion of Zaire.

Erberto Zani/REX/Shutterstock

Erberto Zani/REX/Shutterstock

Miners working to extract coltan often do so in squalid conditions

the Ngola kings. As it reached the western coast of southern Africa, it emptied into a breathtaking canyon underneath the Atlantic. The mere sight of the mighty Kongo inspired the first Portuguese mariners to contemplate unimaginable riches at its source.

But the Kongo also formed the seat of an empire founded by warrior aristocrats. For the Nzingas, the hereditary kings, the presence of the white man was just as enticing. It certainly was for King Alfonso, the newly Christianised ruler of the Kongo Empire, who wished to build a permanent alliance with the Portuguese who had merchandise, science and guns available for barter.

Here lies the great paradox. The beginning of the Kongo's relationship with the West was a fruitful one marked by mutual interest. Neither the Portuguese, the Spanish nor the French ever managed to carve up the heart of Africa in the 16th and 17th centuries. Even at the height of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, the Kongo was just another outlet for shipping the chattel to the New World.

By the late-19th century, however, King Leopold II believed in the soundness of colonial possessions. To fulfil this dream, he hired an eccentric American adventurer, Henry Morton Stanley, and tasked him with claiming the Kongo. Having explored the region over a number of years Stanley was instrumental in laying the foundations for the Congo Free State whose existence was formalised after the Berlin Conference of 1885.

But the colonisation didn't stop there. Respecting the border with Portuguese Angola, the Free State's territory reached neighbouring Katanga, touched the shores of Lake Tanganyika, and extended to the wilderness that skirted the edge of the Sudan. The resulting expanse was the largest piece of real estate known to man, being owned by just one man: King Leopold II.

Leopold II's Congo was a brutal labour camp where as many as 10 million natives perished for the sake of cheap rubber for the industrialised world. When the Congo Free State was annexed by Brussels in 1908, it went about refashioning a modern capital out of Leopoldville, near ancient Kinshasa, and endowed its colony with traces of modern civilisation. However, this didn't make their rule any less repugnant. During World War II, village youths were kidnapped by Belgian officials and pressed into the armed forces. These forgotten battalions marched across the heart of Africa and fought with distinction against the Italians in Abyssinia. In post-colonial Congo, the same harsh methods justified the widespread recruitment of child soldiers.

Upon independence in 1960, attained without the misfortune of civil war, growing concern over Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba's

1996
To get rid of the bothersome Mobutu Sese Seko, different factions are brought together by Rwanda and consolidated into the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, or ADFL.

1997
Striking from South Kivu, Laurent Kabila's forces arrive in Kinshasa and overthrow the Zairean army. To consolidate his rule, the Democratic Republic of Congo is restored.

1998
With Rwanda and Uganda annexing eastern Congo in all but name, Kabila orders the expulsion of foreign troops from Congolese territory. Rather than comply, rebel groups are mobilised to fight Kinshasa.

1999
A forward team of UN observers arrives in Congo. The force soon grows to about 1,000 strong and is organized as MONUSCO, a 35,000-strong multinational peacekeeping army.

1999
Six heads of state meet in Lusaka, Zambia to bring an end to the fighting in eastern Congo. The resulting peace accord fails to dampen hostilities and rebels continue challenging President Kabila's authority.

left-wing politics already had Western leaders on guard. This is what made the insurrection in Katanga a godsend. It justified sending white mercenaries along with a substantial UN peacekeeping force to help "restore" the Congo. In its own way the Katanga Secession, like the shockingly brutal Biafra War in Nigeria, set the pattern for the next half century of violent conflict in Africa.

Rebellion, a way of life

Eastern Congo is a wonder to behold. Rolling hills are carpeted in endless green turf and flourish under the shade of impenetrable rainforest canopy. Tall banana trees with sagging leaves are everywhere. Paved roads are scarce and what passes for towns are often ramshackle collections of buildings. Most commerce is undertaken on bodies of water, where dugouts and small motor-powered barges are the preferred transports.

Move deep into the jungle and the primeval wildlife is a biologist's dream. It's no accident that more than half of Congo's geography is either protected national parks or sanctuaries. The bitter contrast is that the people who inhabit these fertile lands are so vulnerable to the ravages of war. When a semblance of peace finally emerged in the mid-2000s, ushering modest economic growth, not even a little wealth or investment reached the country's frontiers.

Twin terrors persisted. With the explosion of demand for mobile devices, a new mineral called columbite-tantalite, or coltan for short, was exploited in the Kivu region – the Kabila's bailiwick near the border with Rwanda. Coltan was vital for making capacitors and though it was readily available in South America, Congo's own deposits were preferred since the illegal low-cost mining in the east had no government oversight. This opened a huge black market that ran on exploiting poor Congolese people.

The lingering pestilence of marauding guerrillas was ever-present as well. One particularly vicious outfit was the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP). Not beholden by any peace treaty, the CNDP managed to integrate itself with Kinshasa after a deal was reached on 23 March 2009. Rather than surrender their arms and face justice, the CNDP was allowed to act as an extension of the Congolese armed forces.

What happened instead was that the CNDP and its leaders to monopolised the illicit mining

"IT STILL LEFT 1 MILLION PEOPLE DISPLACED, AND REVIVED CONGO'S PROMINENCE AS THE WORLD'S RAPE CAPITAL"

Many soldiers of FARDC were members of different militias before being integrated in 2003

Belgian soldiers rescue Congolese nuns in Yangambi Province, 1964

2001
Laurent Kabila is assassinated by a kadogo bodyguard during a meeting. The suspect, or suspects, are believed to have fled to nearby Brazzaville in the Republic of Congo – a neighbouring country.

2002
The Second Congo War is negotiated to a standstill with the Sun City Agreement signed in South Africa's world-renowned luxury hotel. Democratic elections in 2006 mark the formal end of the conflict.

2009
A leftover rebel group called the CNDP agrees to peace terms with Kinshasa on 23 March. Rather than surrender their arms, Laurent Nkunda and his men are promised military careers.

2012
The CNDP's Laurent Nkunda returns to the bush with his fighters after their integration with the FARDC is neglected. The M23 rebellion leads to the fall of Goma in November.

2013
Given a mandate to fight, MONUSCO joins FARDC on the offensive against the M23, who are scattered by mid-year. It's a rare victory for the UN mission in the Congo.

A bloodthirsty threesome. Here is Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire with his counterparts from Uganda (Idi Amin) and the Central African Republic (Jean Bokassa)

ANL/REX/Shutterstock

2016

Two months after being found guilty of multiple war crimes in The Hague, former rebel and Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba is sentenced to 18 years in prison on 21 June.

2016

With national elections scheduled for November, the whole country is anxious over the prospect of President Joseph Kabila cancelling the polls to keep himself in office. Will this trigger the Third Congo War?

in their enclave. This imperfect relationship with Kinshasa was unsustainable. So in 2012 at least 300 former rebels turned soldiers, turned into rebels once again and began fighting government forces. Kabila's administration didn't hesitate to point fingers at Kigali for instigating the violence since the M23 rebels used Goma – a city on the Rwandan border – as their command centre.

It took a year before the M23 rebellion was crushed by a joint UN and FARDC counteroffensive. It left 1 million people displaced, and revived Congo's prominence as the world's rape capital. Congolese soldiers and M23 rebels used mass sexual assaults to punish civilians caught in the fighting. The legacy of this outrage is the numbing statistic that 50 rapes occurred in Congo every hour during the M23 conflict.

The wake of the M23 rebellion was proof of how dysfunctional Congo is. Those with the guns have a profound entitlement to the land's bounties. When denied, they turn to savagery and oppression.

In June 2016 the International Criminal Court sentenced former Vice President Bemba to 18 years behind bars for war crimes. These were for atrocities committed by soldiers under his command in the Central African Republic, the DRC's miserable sibling in the north and a favourite stomping ground for disparate armed groups.

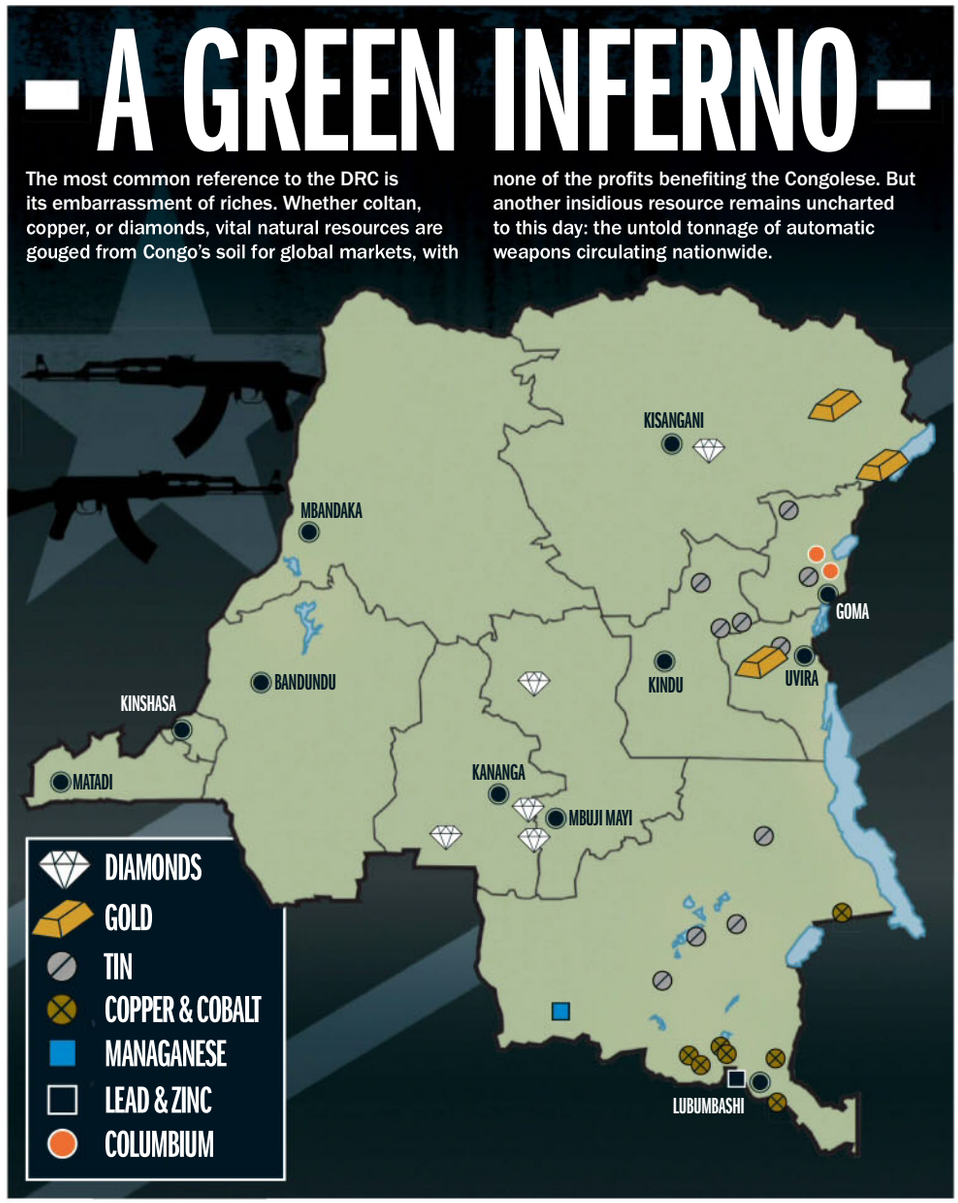
It took this long for Bemba to be served a reckoning for his crimes. Crimes that weren't even committed in his country. Would it be possible for the rest of Congo's leaders, the bloodthirsty politicians and warlords, to answer for their wrongdoings? On whose feet can 500,000 rapes in 20 years and a staggering national death toll be laid? These outrages are too great for anyone to bear; their equal justice may have no measure on this Earth. Such is the Congo, where iniquity prevails over a blessed land and its long-suffering people.

FURTHER READING

- **DANCING IN THE GLORY OF MONSTERS** - THE COLLAPSE OF THE CONGO AND THE GREAT WAR OF AFRICA BY JASON STEARNS
- **CONGO** BY DAVID VAN REYBROUCK

- A GREEN INFERNO -

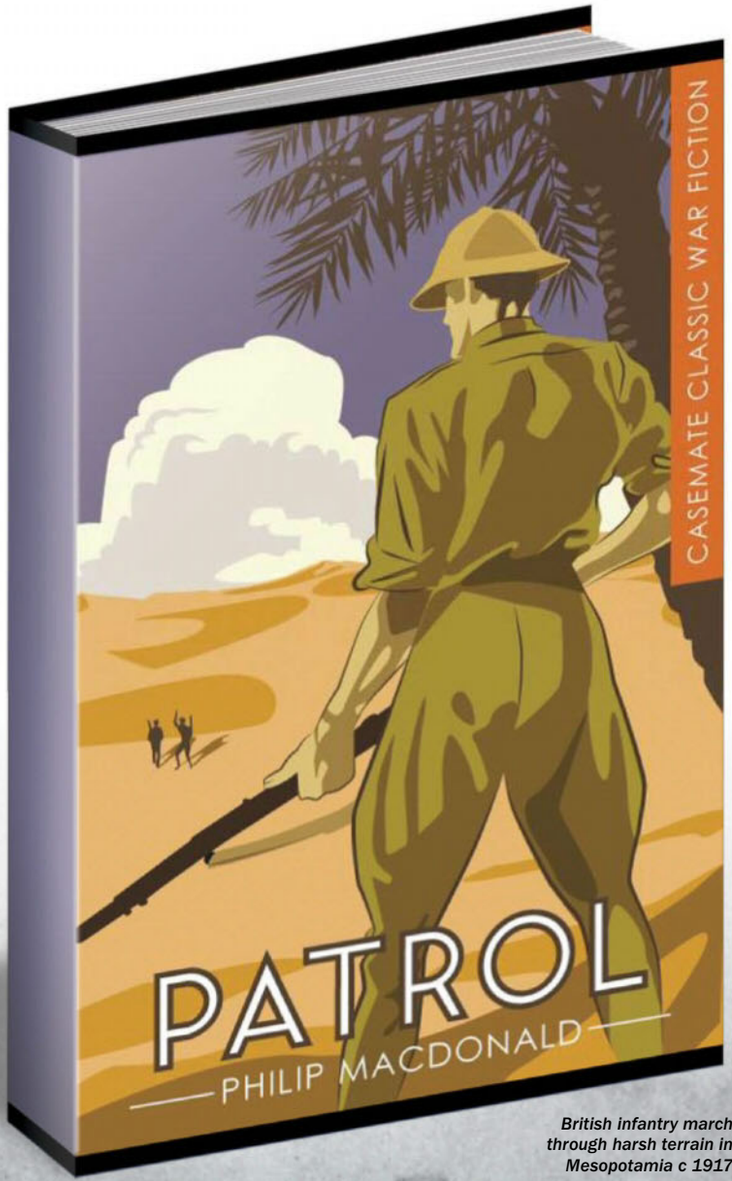
The most common reference to the DRC is its embarrassment of riches. Whether coltan, copper, or diamonds, vital natural resources are gouged from Congo's soil for global markets, with none of the profits benefiting the Congolese. But another insidious resource remains uncharted to this day: the untold tonnage of automatic weapons circulating nationwide.



Images: Alamy, Getty, Rex Features

BOOK REVIEWS

Our pick of the newest military history titles waiting for you on the shelves



PATROL

Writer: Philip MacDonald **Publisher:** Casemate
Price: £9.99

REVIVED 1920S MILITARY THRILLER SHOWS HOW BRITAIN'S TRIUMPHALIST ATTITUDE TOWARDS CONFLICT SHIFTED AFTER WORLD WAR I

British military fiction has a long tradition and this reissue of a lost classic is worth reading on a couple of scores. Firstly, there's its story: set in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq) during World War I, it tells the tale of a British cavalry patrol in the desert. The book opens with the patrol's officer being shot by a sniper. Both the mission's objectives and the patrol's location die with him.

The unit's sergeant orders the remaining men to a nearby oasis where its horses are tied up for the night. On awaking the next morning, the troopers find their horses gone (apparently stolen by locals) and the sentry who'd guarded them dead. An unseen sniper then begins to pick the stranded patrol off one by one, while cultural differences within the unit pull it apart from the inside.

So it works perfectly well as a suspense-driven thriller, but it also tells us something as a historical document. Written in 1927 by Philip MacDonald, one of the most popular authors of inter-war potboilers, it has the whiff of authenticity about it, and with good reason. MacDonald served in Britain's largely calamitous Mesopotamian campaign during World War I and *Patrol* (with its story of a directionless, doomed mission) seems to be his angry response to that military misadventure.

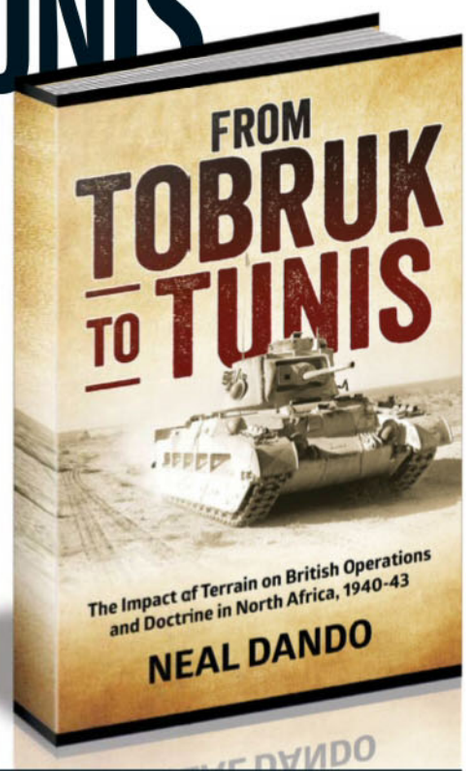
But its bleakness is also at stark odds with the Imperial fiction that had preceded it. AEW Mason's *The Four Feathers* (1902), much of Kipling's oeuvre or the hundreds of thousands of penny comics such as *Chums*, *The Magnet* or *The Gem,* which were sold to Victorian and Edwardian schoolboys, all told tall stories of British pluck and victory in far-flung places. The dreadful reality of World War I changed many things and, if *Patrol* is anything to go by, military fiction was clearly among them.

British infantry march through harsh terrain in Mesopotamia c 1917

FROM TOBRUK TO TUNIS

Writer: Neal Dando **Publisher:** Helion **Price:** £35

NEW EXAMINATION OF THE WESTERN DESERT CAMPAIGN ARGUES THAT TOPOGRAPHY WAS DECISIVE IN DETERMINING HOW THE BATTLE FOR NORTH AFRICA WAS WON AND LOST

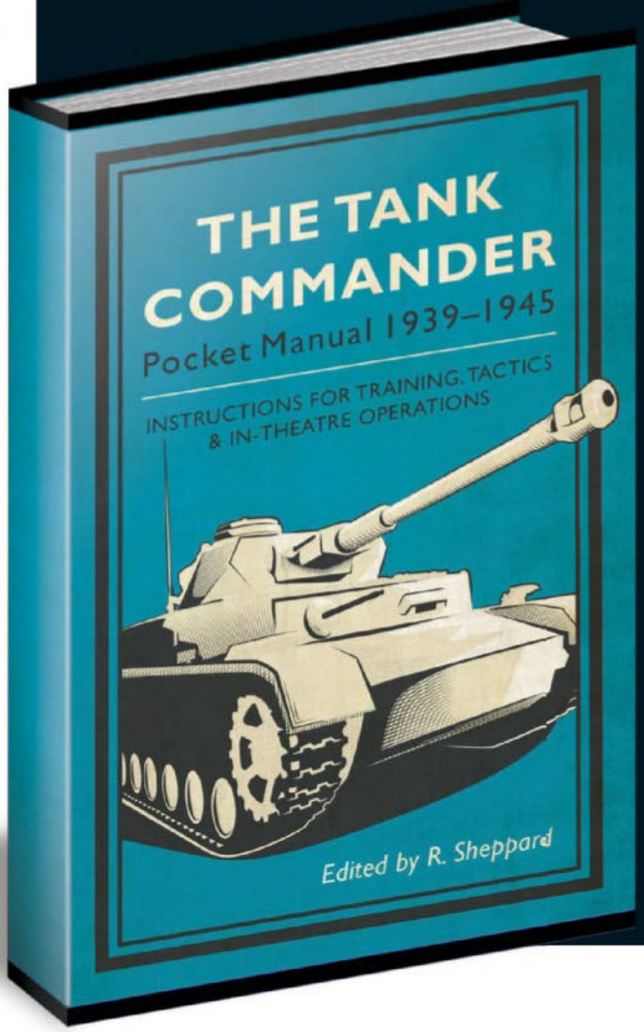


This book is subtitled *The Impact Of Terrain On British Operations And Doctrine In North Africa, 1940-43,* which pretty much sums up its main themes and methodology. The author has taken the unusual approach of exploring a conflict – in this case the Western Desert Campaign of World War II – from a topographical point of view. It's an interesting idea. The war in the desert against Rommel's Afrika Korps is one of the most written about chapters in the history of warfare, but few – if any – have ever really examined how the unique terrain would have directly shaped both tactics and operations.

Neal Dando's main argument is that in order for the British to triumph in North Africa, they needed to hold key positions in the few areas of high ground in the sweeping open vistas – positions from where they could launch effective attacks and outflank the enemy, without the risk of being outmanoeuvred themselves. Dando then shows how the British achieved this through the development of improvised tactical doctrines. The key idea is that combined operations – involving both armoured forces and infantry – were abandoned for much of the fighting. Instead, these two-teeth arms often waged war separately, up until the eve of El Alamein in the autumn of 1942, a successful tactic and flexible approach to the fighting, which Dando argues, was prompted by the desert's unremittingly harsh conditions.

This is a scholarly work rather than a populist one and as such is soundly backed up by meticulous research. Primary historical sources – war diaries, action reports, maps and written orders – are all seamlessly woven into the arguments as supporting evidence. A worthy study that sees the desert campaign from a genuinely fresh perspective.

THE TANK COMMANDER POCKET MANUAL 1939-45



Writer: R Sheppard **Publisher:** Pool of London **Price:** £8.99

A SMART LITTLE GUIDE THAT AIMS TO GET YOU INSIDE THE TANKS THAT WON WORLD WAR II

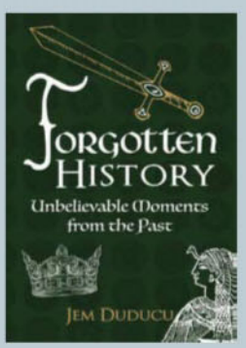
Tanks first appeared on the battlefield during World War I, lumbering into action in September 1916 at the Battle of the Somme. They were to prove so decisive in that conflict that when it came to preparing for the next one, Hitler deemed them a war-winning weapon, rebuilding Germany's military around more than 40 divisions of mechanised armour. When his armies swept through France in 1940, they did so not on horseback or foot as they had done in 1914, but in hundreds of tanks. The early Blitzkrieg successes his panzer-borne warriors enjoyed were enough to persuade other nations that they too must build vast armoured armies.

Throughout nearly six years of fighting, tank crews were to find themselves repeatedly at the sharp end: during Germany's invasion of Russia in 1941, in the campaign in the Western Desert until 1943, and again in Western Europe in 1944 throughout the Normandy Campaign and the Battle of the Bulge. The war was also to see the biggest tank battle in history when a staggering 2,500 German tanks took on more than 5,000 Soviet tanks at the Battle of Kursk, resulting in more than 200,000 casualties.

What this neat little book does is attempt to put the reader – figuratively – into the turret of the tanks that fought in those epic campaigns. Drawing on original documentation from British, Russian, German and American archives, it gives you an idea not just of the technical specifications of the monstrous machines each country produced but the kind of training tank crews would have undergone and the tactics they would have employed. It's a clever idea, allowing the reader to indulge in a spot of tank-based time travel to some of the most violent confrontations in history – all from the safety of an armchair.

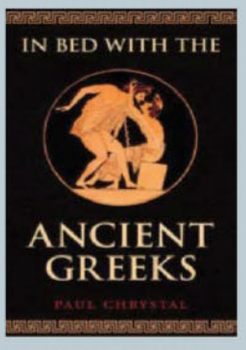
"WHAT THIS NEAT LITTLE BOOK DOES IS ATTEMPT TO PUT THE READER – FIGURATIVELY – INTO THE TURRET OF THE TANKS THAT FOUGHT IN THOSE EPIC CAMPAIGNS"

ALL ABOUT HISTORY RECOMMENDED READING



FORGOTTEN HISTORY: UNBELIEVABLE MOMENTS FROM THE PAST

Not all history is available at your fingertips, and many of the best stories need some digging. *Forgotten History* is a collection of these hidden gems that you didn't learn in school – from the ancient world to the 20th century. Ultimately, some are better than others, but it's definitely more hit than it is miss. Tales range from the silly (Ancient Greeks putting a statue on trial) to the sinister (Ala ad-Din, the man who dared defy Genghis Khan) and the occasional myth buster (croissants aren't French). Any fans of *Horrible Histories* or *QI* need this.



IN BED WITH THE ANCIENT GREEKS

The sexual habits of the Ancient Greeks have played a large role in how we have come to understand Greek society and mythology for a long time. Incestuous relationships between the gods, homoerotic art and the suggestion that homosexual intercourse was accepted has fascinated academics across the years. Paul Chrystal attempts to lift the veil on what the Greeks did between the sheets, what cultural significance their sexual habits had, and what it can tell us about their beliefs.

MAX

The baby at the centre of this darkly original novel, Max, is actually called Konrad von Kebnersol, christened by the Führer himself when he was born into the Lebensborn programme, a eugenics project that (though the book is fiction) really existed. You are guided through the atrocities of World War II and the Nazi regime from a rather unconventional perspective: the perfect Aryan baby, whose Nazi ideals are broadcast loud and clear before he is even born. In this strange mix between *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Boy In The Striped Pyjamas*, it's interesting to witness a child with an unquestionable faith in the Nazi ideology have his beliefs shaken by the realities of war.

THE HARROWING

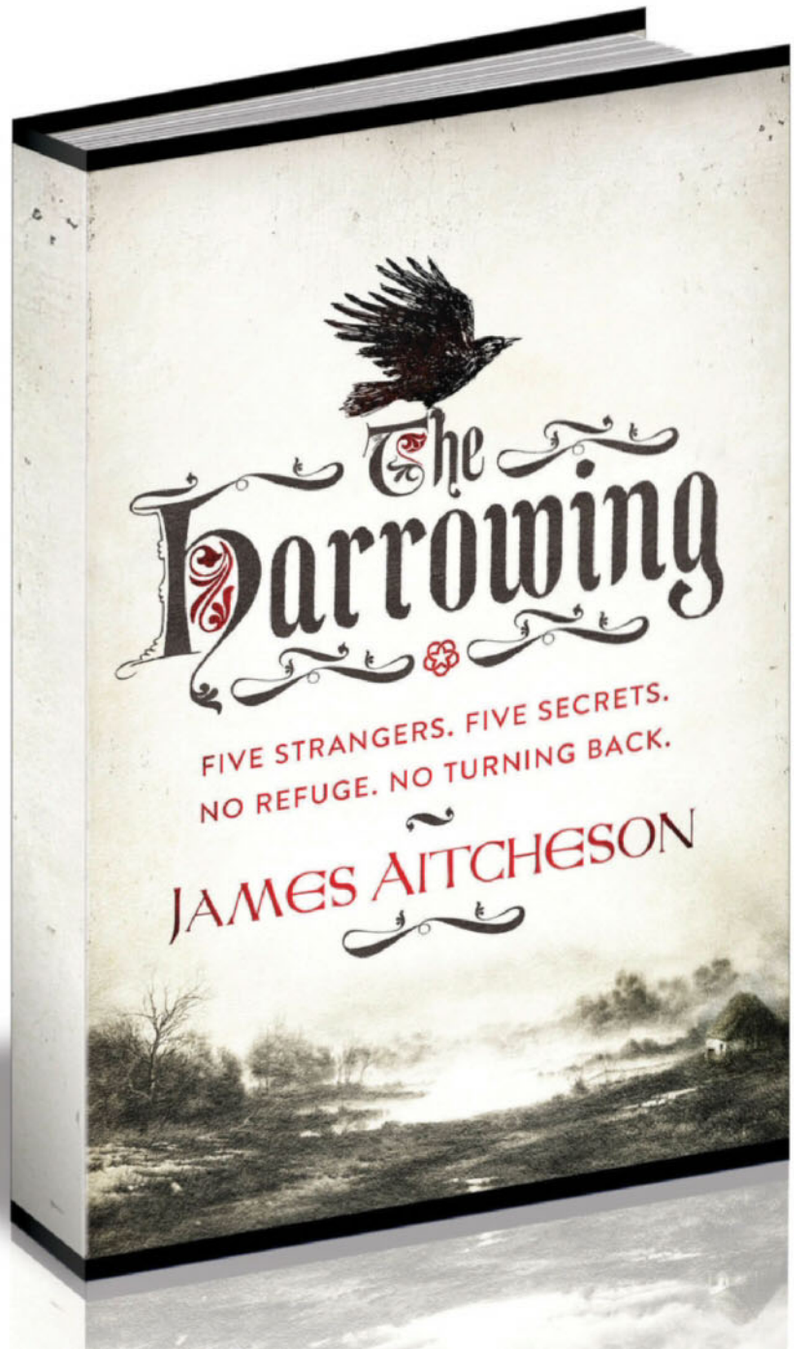
Author: James Aitcheson **Publisher:** Heron Books **Price:** £16.99

WILLIAM WADED THROUGH BLOOD TO CLAIM THE ENGLISH CROWN. THIS IS THE STORY OF HOW HE DEVASTATED THE NORTH

James Aitcheson made his name with his *Sworn Sword* trilogy of novels set in the years after the conquest, which followed the fortunes of one of William's knights. In this standalone novel, he puts previous hero Tancred aside to look at the aftermath of defeat from the point of view of the English and, in doing so, makes a huge step up as a writer.

As a scholar of the period, there's never been any doubting the historical accuracy of Aitcheson's work, but in the taught prose of *The Harrowing*, he proves himself completely as a writer. Five refugees from the reviving Normans who are laying waste the north to snuff out any possibility of future rebellions come together, fleeing through a brutal winter towards the hope of sanctuary. The story follows them through their flight, as well as telling the tale of what formed and made them all: fleeing noblewoman, servant, warrior, priest, and bard.

In line with his historical training, there's always been an anti-heroic theme to Aitcheson's novels, but this goes further. In its bleak depiction of small-scale battles and large-scale despoiling, it presents a far truer picture of the nature of Medieval warfare than the action fantasies that generally get published under the label of historical fiction. In fact, *The Harrowing* was so good that not even being written in the present tense served to diminish it. Highly recommended.



POSTCARDS FROM THE FRONT

Author: Kate J Cole
Publisher: Amberley Publishing **Price:** £14.99

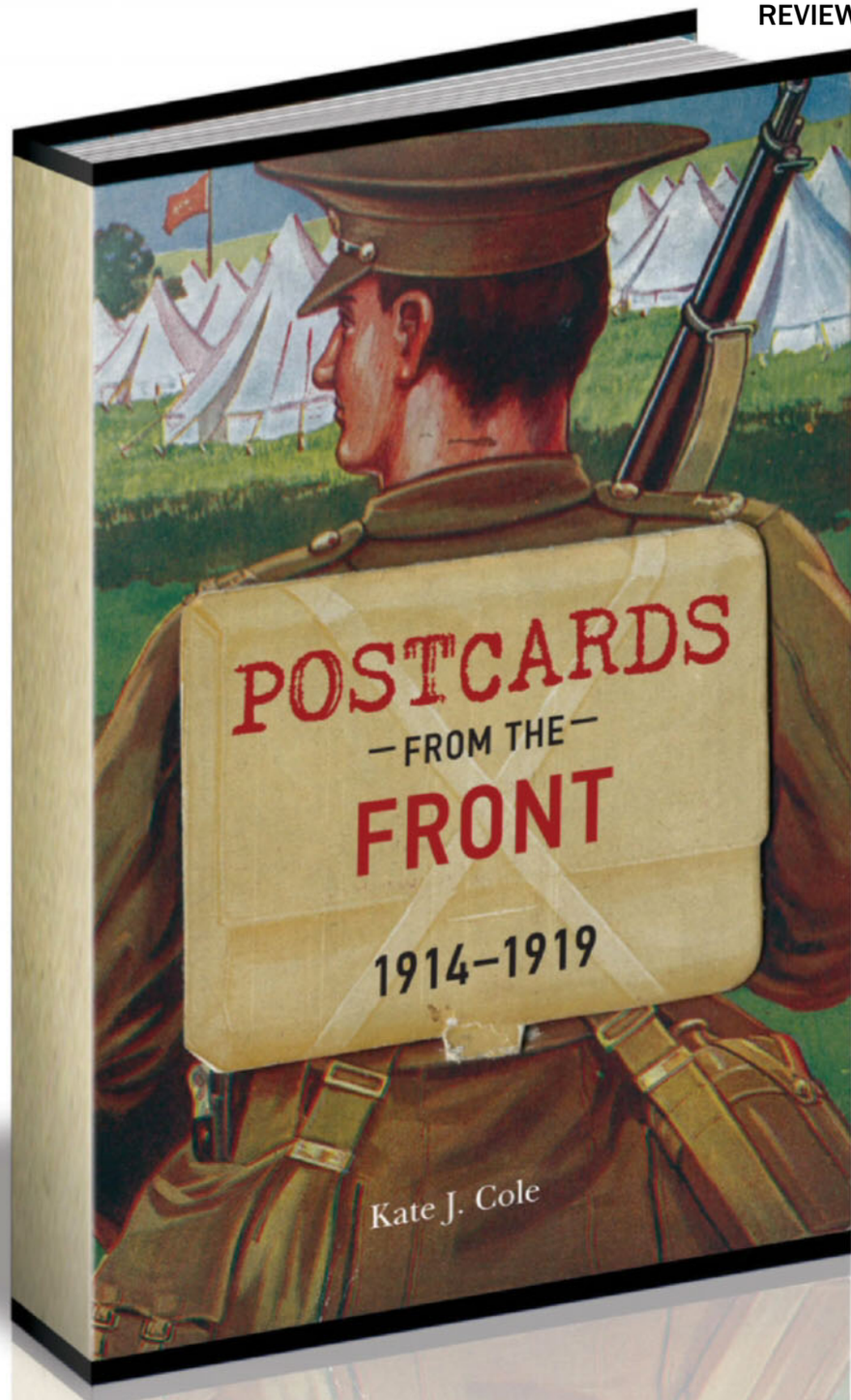
SOMETIMES POIGNANT AND ALWAYS INTERESTING, THESE CARDS HOME FROM SOLDIERS PROVIDE A WINDOW INTO COMBATANTS' WAYS OF DEALING WITH WAR

Postcards were the Snapchat of their day: (almost) instant messages sent with an accompanying picture to reassure the receiver of the good health of the sender. For soldiers serving in World War I on the Western Front, they provided quick communication with home, often scribbled on breaks from marching. Postcards were the counterpoint to the considered letter.

Cole shows the pictures chosen by soldiers serving, as well as reproducing the messages, thus serving to confirm the notion that the British really are obsessed with the weather: seemingly every postcard includes a comment on whether it is wet or dry, hot or snowing, while generally eschewing any mention of the actual war. This highlights the stoicism and restraint of the men and women of the time: a nurse, serving in a field hospital taking casualties from the Somme, in her first postcard home after the start of the battle, writes about the weather (naturally), asks after her mother's health and sends thanks for letters received. Not one word of the casualties filling the hospital. Of course this may have been because all postcards were censored, but the overwhelming impression is of brave men and women seeking to protect their loved ones from the reality of war.

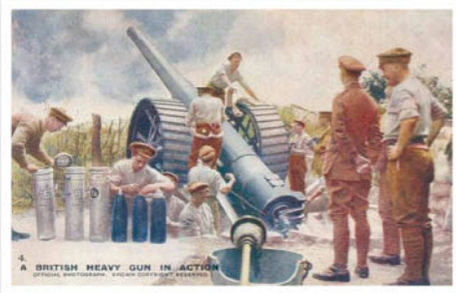
The two best chapters follow a pair of nurse friends and two serving brothers through their wars, setting their postcards against the events that they faced. Although I began this review by saying postcards were the Snapchat of that time, it's hard to believe we would respond with the same understated bravery if ever we were to face such trials.

The book concludes with three useful appendices on researching World War I postcards, including what can be gleaned from the censors' mark and the army postmark.

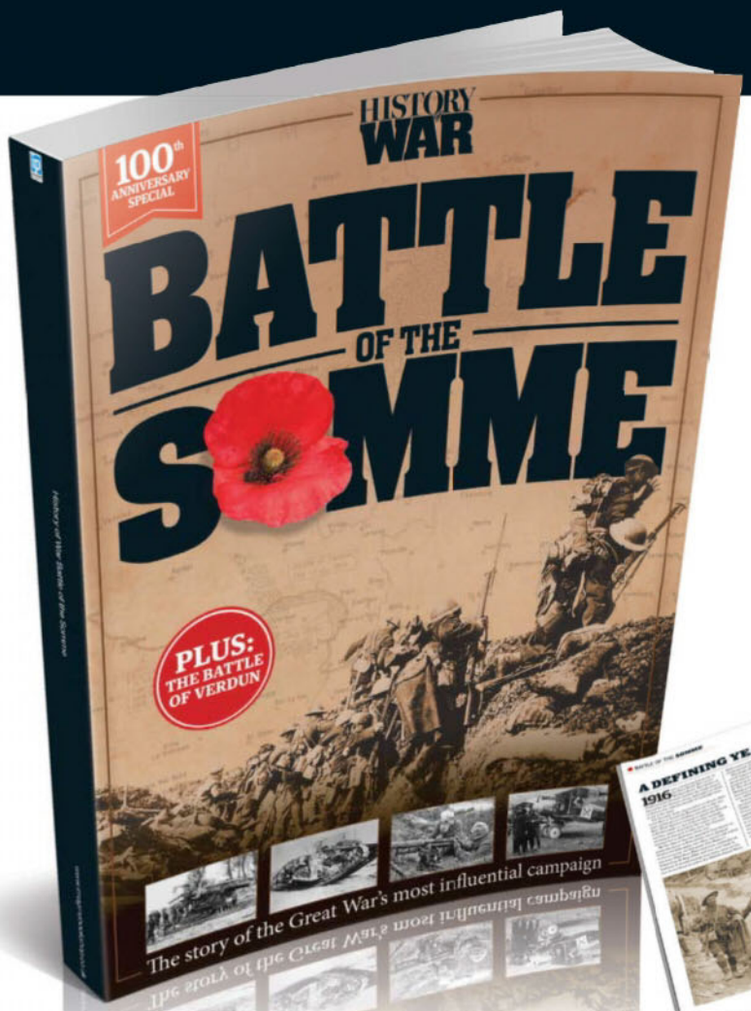


"THE BRITISH ARE OBSESSED WITH THE WEATHER: SEEMINGLY EVERY POSTCARD INCLUDES A COMMENT ON WHETHER IT IS WET OR DRY, HOT OR SNOWING, WHILE GENERALLY ESCHEWING ANY MENTION OF THE ACTUAL WAR"

***Below:** Various postcards showing a British 12-inch railway gun on a Mk II Armstong mounting, a captured German IV tank and a British 6-inch gun in action*



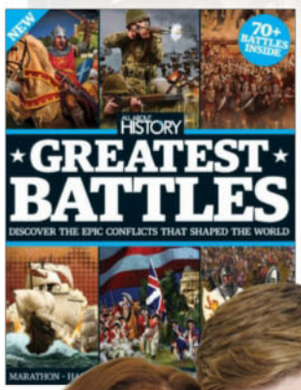
From the makers of HISTORY OF WAR

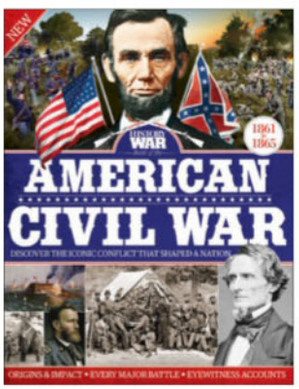


BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Battle of the Somme was one of history's bloodiest campaigns. Follow the course of events by examining authentic artefacts – including battle maps, telegrams and even pigeon-carried directives – as well as first-hand accounts by way of personal letters, drawings and diary entries.

Also available...





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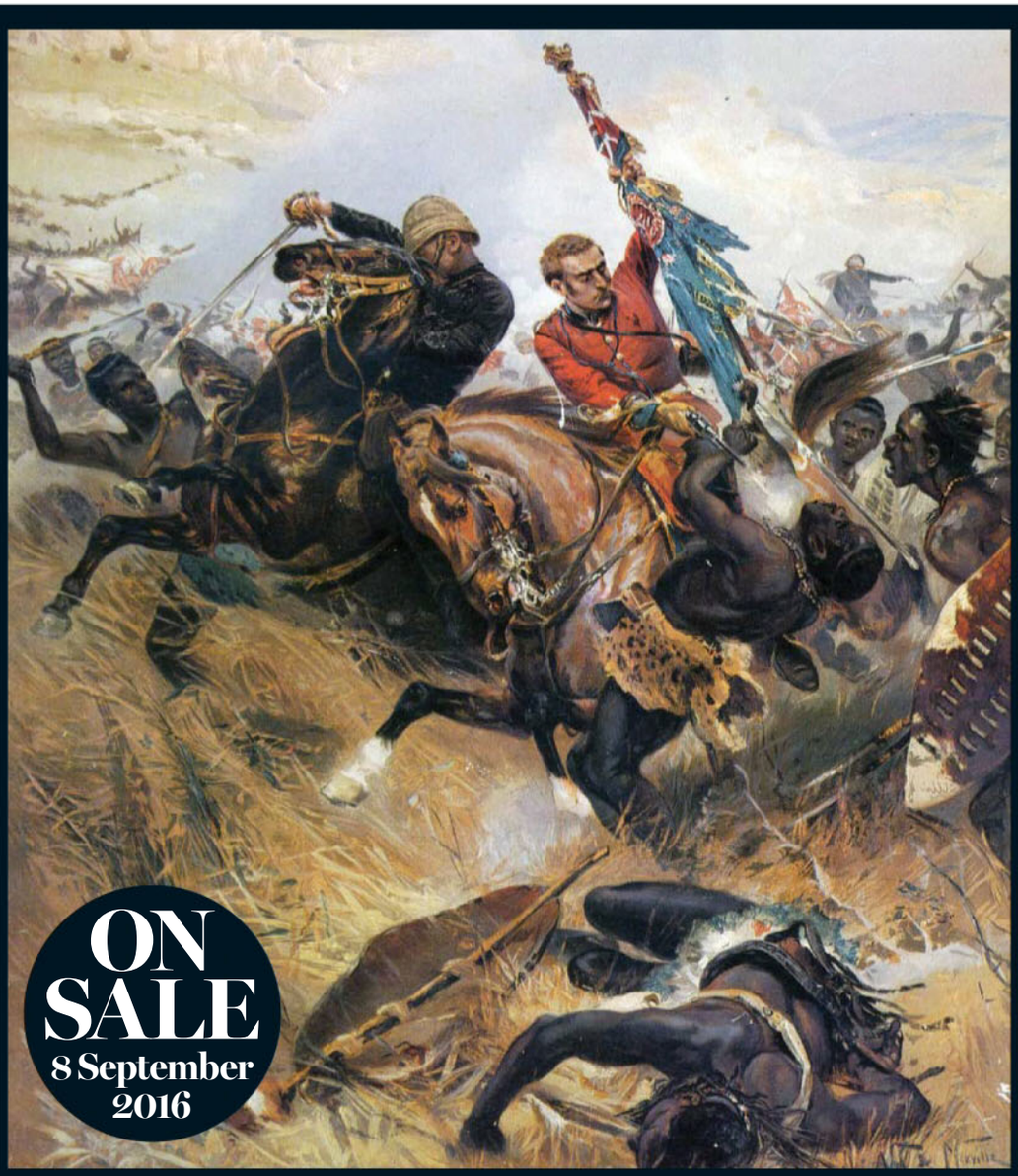

ON SALE
8 September 2016

NEXT MONTH

BRITAIN'S ZULU WAR

ON THE BLOODY PATH TO IMPERIAL DOMINANCE

HISTORY of WAR

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CIVIL WAR BREASTPLATE

***Right:** Armoured breastplates were a common piece of equipment for soldiers of the British Civil Wars but they were of limited use against musketry and artillery*

This piece of armour from 1643 is a poignant relic of the deadly cost of the British Civil Wars

It is very rare to link a 17th-century military artefact to an ordinary soldier, but this piece of armour is a remarkable survival from the British Civil Wars. In 1643 the war between King Charles I and the English Parliament was in a state of flux and neither side could gain a decisive advantage. Consequently, English towns could change hands several times, such as Gainsborough in Lincolnshire. It was during the siege of this town that a soldier called John Hussey was shot.

Hussey was a native of Lincolnshire, from Doddington Hall, and a cavalry officer fighting for the king. He was defending Gainsborough from a parliamentarian army that included Oliver Cromwell among its ranks. A Parliamentarian musket ball killed him on 27 July 1643, when it penetrated the upper rim of his steel breastplate and entered the right part of his chest. The wound carried fragments of metal, leather and cloth, which tore into his right lung. The exact angle of the shot is unclear, but it may have been from above, while the attacker was on horseback. Death would have occurred from bleeding, heart failure and suffocation within 24 hours. The bullet hole is a sad indicator that the age of gunpowder was rendering personal armour obsolete.

Hussey was one victim among countless others during the British Civil Wars but unlike most, his armour was preserved by his family at Doddington Hall and there is even a surviving portrait of him that provides a human face to a savage conflict that tore Britain apart.

Right:** The complete uniform of John Hussey is on display at the National Civil War Centre in Newark, which is open daily from 10am-5pm. For more information visit: **www.nationalcivilwarcentre.com

***Left:** A portrait of John Hussey. Like many other members of the English gentry, Hussey fought and died for King Charles I*

Images: National Civil War Centre

The Great War - 100 Years

PART THREE - BATTLES

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